The New Criterion

April 1997

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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The New Criterion *April 1997*

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Published monthly except July and August by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc., 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019, a nonprofit public foundation as described in Section 501 (c) (3) of the Internal Revenue code, which solicits and accepts contributions from a wide range of sources, including public and private foundations, corporations, and the general public. ISSN 0734-0222. April 1997, Volume 15, Number 8. Subscriptions: $36 for one year, $65 for two. Outside the United States, add $7 per year. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and at additional mailing offices. Subscribers: send all remittances, changes of address, and subscription inquiries to The New Criterion, P.O. Box 3000, Denville, NJ 07834. For subscription problems call (800) 783-4903. Copyright © 1997 by The Foundation for Cultural Review, Inc. Newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., One Media Way, 12406 Rt. 250, Milan, OH 44846. (800) 221-3148. Available in microfilm from University Microfilms, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. All correspondence should be addressed to The New Criterion, 850 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10019. (212) 247-6980. Notice of nonreceipt must be sent to the Office Manager within three months of the issue date.

Advertising: Galleries & fine arts: Fred Stern, 44 Paulin Boulevard, Leonia, NJ 07605. (201) 947-2674.
Publishers & others: Richard A. Vaughan, 129 Phelps Avenue, Rockford, IL 61108. (815) 398-8569.

The New Criterion is designed by Alvin and James Eisenman. It is set in 10-point Galliard and is printed by Science Press in Ephrata, Pennsylvania, USA.

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Spring 1997 $7 • $9 Can. • £5

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Notes & Comments: April 1997

"The Cold War and the Closet," or, How to review a book "The New Yorker" wants to kill

First, change the subject. Does the book under review—*Whittaker Chambers: A Biography* by Sam Tanenhaus—focus on the lives of Communist spies in high places and a historic trial that altered the course of American history? In that case, you had better change the subject to sex. Communist spies in high places is old hat, and today's *New Yorker* doesn't traffic in yesterday's fashions. Sex is always sexier than politics, anyway—even the politics of prominent traitors. Besides, nobody remembers what happened in the Depression era and the Cold War. It was all so long ago, and Stalin doesn't matter anymore. Stalin lost his chic before you were born. Sex is always chic.

Next, invent a scenario based on a false parallel. Did the discovery of Communist spies in high levels of government induce an atmosphere of political suspicion, anxiety, and distrust? No problem. You need only find a sexual parallel that can be pressed into service as a substitute cause of Cold War suspicion, anxiety, and distrust. In other words, homosexuality. It used to be a forbidden subject at *The New Yorker* in the bad old days, but today it's often a priority item, and in the right—which is to say, the Left—hands, it can be called upon to explain more things than ever before.

Finally, think big. Since the actual history of the era under discussion obstinately refuses to conform to the lineaments of *The New Yorker*'s most treasured Left-liberal sentiments, you had better dream up a new and daring alternative history that can account for the fact that there really was a Cold War even if—and this is the point—it wasn't the Cold War you have been led to believe it was.

You—silly fool—thought the Cold War was about Communist expansion, totalitarian terror, and things like that. What it was really about, according to *The New Yorker*, was the need to provide homosexuals in high places with a capacious closet in which to hide. Please understand: we are not making this up. This is not some late-night television comedy skit or one of those gamy scenarios encountered in the nether regions of the Internet. What we are attempting to describe here is Sidney Blumenthal's mendacious review of *Whittaker Chambers: A Biography* that was published in the March 17 issue of *The New Yorker* under the title of "The Cold War and the Closet."

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Or perhaps one should say, Mr. Blumenthal's non-review, for the political screed that this stalwart apologist for Left-liberal orthodoxy wrote in lieu of a review never for a moment attempted to come to terms with the book that Sam Tanenhaus actually wrote. Instead, this proud heir of the Walter Duranty-Harrison Salisbury tradition in American journalism produced an alternative text for his *New Yorker* review—a text that bears little resemblance to Sam Tanenhaus's biography and one that appears to exist only in Mr. Blumenthal's head—and wrote about that. And in his glowing account of that self-authored, alternative text Mr. Blumenthal triumphantly concluded his crackpot summation of the Cold War with the most remarkable revisionist theory we have yet encountered on the subject: "What endures," he wrote of the Cold War, "is the fear of the enemy within: the homosexual menace."

Well, there is this to be said for this novel theory: it certainly succeeds in changing the subject. In the course of *The New Yorker*'s non-review, Alger Hiss's treachery as a Soviet agent effectively disappears, and so does Whittaker Chambers's courage in exposing it. So, for that matter, does Sam Tanenhaus's book, which is effectively reduced to a backdrop for a prurient drama of world-historical homosexual intrigue.

It was, of course, convenient for *The New Yorker* to avail itself of Sidney Blumenthal's virtuosic attempt at Soviet-style historical denial. While Alger Hiss lived, *The New Yorker*'s portfolio on the Hiss case had been left in the hands of his son, Tony Hiss, formerly a staff writer on the magazine, who was accorded the privilege of writing love letters to his father whenever the Hiss case turned up in the news. Given this history of Hiss-friendly coverage, Sam Tanenhaus's book obviously posed a considerable problem for *The New Yorker.* Not only does the book mark *finis* to the question of Hiss's guilt as the most illustrious traitor of his American generation, but the book itself is so compelling in its account of Chambers's life that there was no possibility of its being ignored.

The folks at *The New Yorker* are not dumb about such matters. So they went into action to mount a preemptive assault on the book. Their first initiative was to secure exclusive pre-publication serial rights to the book, which effectively prevented any other magazine from offering readers an advance acquaintance with its revelations. Then, of course, *The New Yorker* declined to act on its pre-publication rights, but only at a time so close to the publication of the book that no advance publication elsewhere was any longer possible. It was deliberate political sabotage masquerading as publishing inertia. Meanwhile, Tina Brown—the editor of *The New Yorker*—assigned the task of assassinating the book to Sidney Blumenthal, whose talents for such a task are well-known to her.

In this story of editorial and political perfidy, the real villain isn't Sidney Blumenthal—a hack radical journalist who does what comes naturally to his species—but Tina Brown, who has done more to debase the profession of serious journalism than any other editor now active on the American scene. It's worth remembering in this connection that when her predecessor at *The New Yorker*—Harold Ross—engaged a writer to deal with the momentous subject of spies and traitors, he chose Rebecca West. It says everything we need to know about Tina Brown and *The New Yorker* in the 1990s that she regards the likes of Sidney Blumenthal as an appropriate successor to the author of *The Meaning of Treason.*

Speaking of Sidney Blumenthal . . .

Lest anyone one believe that such vicious partisan misrepresentation is an anomaly for

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Mr. Blumenthal, we wish to call our readers' attention to the brief but telling discussion David Horowitz provides of this darling of the Left in his riveting memoir, *Radical Son: A Generational Odyssey*, just published by the Free Press. Toward the end of the book, Mr. Horowitz describes the "journalistic firing squad" that assembled to discredit him and his longtime collaborator, Peter Collier, after their political conversion in the 1980s from radical Marxism to—well, we suppose we would have to call Mr. Horowitz's position Neoconservative. In fact, it is what would once have been called a moderate liberalism. As Mr. Horowitz explains,

> the conservatism I had arrived at could be expressed in a single patriotic idea: The revolutionary failures of the Twentieth Century had demonstrated the wisdom of the American founding, and validated its tenets: private property, individual rights, and a limited state.

For espousing such perfidious beliefs, Messrs. Horowitz and Collier have been regularly calumniated as "renegades," "McCarthyites," and worse by all the usual left-wing hatchet men: Alexander Cockburn, Christopher Hitchens, Eric Alterman, Todd Gitlin, and Hendrick Hertzberg. On one occasion, Susan Sontag's son David Rieff literally spat at Mr. Horowitz. In a feature for *The Washington Post*, Mr. Blumenthal wrote that

> when Horowitz abandoned radicalism, he also left his wife and three children, escaping into conservatism and Beverly Hills. "When I was a Marxist, I was puritanical," he said. "Then I got loose."

Mr. Horowitz comments: "There was hardly a detail in these sentences that was accurate. I had four children, not three; years separated my divorce from my political change of heart; I didn't 'escape' into conservatism; I never lived in Beverly Hills; the phrase about getting 'loose' was pure invention." Clearly, Mr. Blumenthal is someone who lives by Lenin's terrifying dictum that the aim of political debate is not to win the argument but rather to obliterate your opponent from the face of the earth.

Radical Son is a powerful and moving book. In the deepest sense, it is a book about growing up, politically, intellectually, spiritually. The "odyssey" that Mr. Horowitz describes—from his youth as as a "red diaper baby" and his involvement with *Ramparts* magazine and Huey Newton and the Black Panthers to his conversion in the aftermath of the murder of a friend by the Panthers—is a journey from the destructiveness of self-infatuated utopianism to an acknowledgment that freedom without limits brings tyranny, not liberation. "The more I thought about the moral posturing of the Left," Mr. Horowitz writes in his chapter "Second Thoughts,"

> the more I saw that its genius lay not in reforms but in framing indictments. Resentment and retribution were the radical passions. In *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, Marx had invoked a dictum of Goethe's devil: "Everything that exists deserves to perish." It was the progressive *credo*. To the Left, neither honored traditions nor present institutions reflected human nature or desire; the past was only a dead weight to be removed from their path. When the Left called for "liberation," what it really wanted was to erase the human slate and begin again in the year zero of creation.

Radical Son is full of harrowing personal detail—Mr. Horowitz has been through a great deal in his fifty-odd years—but the book's real importance lies not in its anecdotal revelations or even in its political message but in its embrace of a chastened realism, a modesty not personal but metaphysical. Writing about the history of his collaboration with Peter Collier, Mr. Horowitz reflects that

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> our former comrades were always saying things like "smash monogamy," and putting the family under attack as an oppressive institution. But in our work [we] had come to appreciate two things. The first was the resilience and creativity of the family, which invents and heals its wounds and endures, and finally gets its members out of the messes they got themselves into. The second was that the family was a theater for lessons about the finite nature of the human enterprise. Its reality flew in the face of the radical utopians who felt they were going to live forever. They had failed to see the tragic dimension of human nature—that the pell-mell embrace of the ineffable and the infinite, the future without consequences, is dangerous.

And again:

> The idea that men can be as gods and re-create a paradise on earth is the serpentine promise of the Left. It is an idolatry that overshadows all others. When men put on the mantle of gods and attempt to remake the world in their own image, the results are hideous and destructive beyond conception.

This is a wisdom that, although fraught with political implication, goes far beyond partisan politics. In the end, the importance of *Radical Son* lies less in its tale of political conversion than in its frank acknowledgment of the seductive sources of human folly.

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The future of the European past: VIII

Present-tense culture

by Mark Steyn

A year or two back, my small town in New Hampshire completed the decades-long process of educational "consolidation" and closed our last one-room schoolhouse—a fine 1839 clapboard academy atop a hill overlooking a small settlement. For the last thirty years, it had been used as the town kindergarten, but now the little ones have gone downhill to join their siblings in the first-to-eighth grade school. The town isn't sure yet what to do with the building, so the classroom's been tidied up and decorated with some surviving artifacts of its illustrious past. On the blackboard is a typical math exercise of the mid-nineteenth century: "If 46 yards of cloth cost £53 10s 6d, what is that per yard?" The tattered volume from which it's taken sits on a pupil's desk three rows back, with the names of several of the town's oldest families inscribed inside. It's an American book published in 1855—a time when children were required to do compound division not only in their own decimal currency but in the more awkward coinage of distant lands.

I wonder how many elementary school pupils today could answer that question? I wonder how many of their teachers could? I wonder how many would be able to tell you what "sterling" was and of which country it was the currency? If you object that, in an age of computers and calculators, nobody needs to be able to do long division, the vast army of Americans mortgaged to the hilt and drowning in credit-card debt suggests otherwise. We don't buy yards of cloth so much, but how about "If North Country Chevrolet offers you a two-year lease for twenty-four thousand miles at $299 per month with $750 down, how much are you paying per mile (Vermont residents add sales tax)?" or "If MCI calls up and offers you a calling plan of 12¢ per minute off peak . . . ?"

A few miles down the road from our abandoned academy is our triumphantly consolidated elementary school. You know when you're getting near because a sign tells you, as it does in every town in the state, that you're now entering a "Drug-Free School Zone." I loathe that sign not because of any drug danger, real or perceived, but because of the priorities it implies: it seems the best we can hope for from a public education system is that our children aren't heroin dealers by the time they've been through it. But why stop there? Why not "You Are Now Entering a Latin-Free School Zone"? That, at least, is beyond dispute.

In England and Wales, according to a recent survey, pre-Romantic poetry has almost vanished from the classrooms—not because the pupils can't understand it, but because the teachers can't. Pope? Milton? Marvell and his "Coy Mistress"? Love to help you, mate, but I can't make head or tail of it. On the other hand, an inability to understand the language is no obstacle to

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being able to "empathize" with previous generations. "Empathy" is what passes for history in most British and North American schools these days: you'll be asked to "empathize" with a West African who is sold into slavery and shipped off to the British West Indies, or with a hapless Native American who catches dysentery, typhoid, gonorrhea, a heavy cold, and an early strain of HIV by foolishly buying beads from Christopher Columbus.

The exercise would be worthwhile if we genuinely "empathized" with them: the Indian might be motivated by greed or lust or fury, the black slave might be fatalistic, optimistic, indifferent. But that's not what educational "empathy" is about: instead we're supposed to assign the slave a contemporary African-American identity and thereby understand his sense of injustice; we're supposed to acknowledge the Native American as the first victim of European racism. It seems the Indians never scalped anyone, unless you count the mass frontal lobotomy they've metaphorically performed on the teachers' unions. This is the very opposite of "empathy"; it's the projection of our drearily limited obsessions—racism, sexism, imperialism, homophobia—over the rich canvas of the past. That's the thing about "diversity" and "multiculturalism": they lead, paradoxically but remorselessly, to homogeneity and parochialism.

Funnily enough, across the corridor in the English classroom, the teacher is less happy to trust to our "empathy." As a child, I read all kinds of books, good and bad: *Tom Sawyer* and *Tom Brown*, *Treasure Island* and C. S. Lewis, Sir Walter Scott and *Anne of Green Gables* . . . I had no idea that these books were not "relevant" to me. I was aware that most of these children lived lives that differed from mine to one degree or another—in Enid Blyton, the "Famous Five" exist on a diet of ginger beer and veal-ham-and-egg pie, neither of which I'd experienced. But it never occurred to me that such details were preventing me from "relating" to these stories. A child has no very precise sense of time, of anachronisms, of obsolescence, of whether his adventures are set in the 1950s or 1920s or 1700s—or what those designations mean: his imagination soars free of such considerations.

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Back in small-town New Hampshire, when the Congregational Church celebrated its bicentenary, a little boy, impressed by the pageant, said to the elderly lady who'd organized it, "Wow! You mean you do this every 200 years?"

There will be time enough later on to fence ourselves in with superficial prejudices and define ourselves generationally: baby boomers or Gen Xers, disco or grunge, "Brady Bunch" or "Beavis and Butt-head" . . . In those first formative years, a child's mind is untrammeled: he or she doesn't notice that Huck Finn and Heidi are "out of date"; the concept, at that age, is meaningless. It's only a problem for our educators, projecting onto their charges the same misbegotten "empathy" they tout for America's victim classes.

Wander into the children's section of the bookstore and pluck at random. Jacket copy for Lois Ruby's *Skin Deep*: "Dan was her best friend, her boyfriend, a good guy. He'd always been a little withdrawn, but he never seemed like the type to hate people for the color of their skin. Or for what they believed. Laurel soon realizes that Dan's in too deep. That her boyfriend has become a

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neo-Nazi skinhead." Or John Neufeld's *Almost a Hero*: "Ben is convinced his spring vacation has been ruined by his social studies teacher's assignment—a week's volunteer service for a community charity. Haunted by something dark in his own past, Ben chooses to work at Sidewalk's End, a day care center for homeless children. When Ben believes he sees Batista, one of the Sidewalk's End kids, being abused by his mother at a grocery store, he is frustrated by his inability to get the authorities to act to protect the child."

These two approaches—false "empathy" and bogus "relevance"—were not cooked up by the public schools in isolation; they run right through contemporary culture. What is Demi Moore's version of *The Scarlet Letter* but an especially severe case of misplaced "empathy"? The past is history. That's to say, it's history in the sense of that robust and revealing American formulation: "Bob Dole? Aw, he's history!"—as in fuhgeddabout him, he's through, he's washed up, he don't mean diddlysquat, he won't trouble us no more, we need pay him no further heed. He's history.

If a living culture has traditionally been a dialogue between the present and the past, then today one side has fallen silent. In the din of the present, our ancestral voices have a harder time than ever making their presence felt. When was the last time you heard a politician quote a Greek or a Roman, or anybody before Churchill?

It's a superb phrase, awesome in its contempt, exhaustive in its concision, and a fine catchphrase for the times. If a living culture has traditionally been a dialogue between the present and the past, then today one side has fallen silent—or, at any rate, been drowned out. In the din of the present—the bass line of the CD thudding from the apartment downstairs, the TV flickering away in front of the bored gas station clerk, the bleep-bleep-bleep of the video arcade—our ancestral voices have a harder time than ever making their presence felt. When was the last time you heard a politician quote a Greek or a Roman, or anybody before Churchill? In 1940, Leo Amery, speaking in the House of Commons after the fall of France, rebuked Neville Chamberlain and his colleagues thus:

> I will quote certain other words. I do it with great reluctance, because I am speaking of those who are old friends and associates of mine, but they are words which, I think, are applicable to the present situation. This is what Cromwell said to the Long Parliament when he thought it was no longer fit to conduct the affairs of the nation: "You have sat too long here for any good you have been doing. Depart, I say, and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go."

Maybe someone should try that with President Clinton. Then again, maybe it's too long for a soundbite. There was pop culture in 1940, even within the Palace of Westminster: the MP A. P. Herbert was a successful humorist and lyricist and the author of the popular song "Other People's Babies." Across the Atlantic, there was *Pal Joey* and Major Bowes, Superman and *Fantasia*, Jack Benny and the Andrews Sisters—and a new hamburger restaurant started by a couple of Pasadena movie-theater owners, Richard and Maurice McDonald. But, in those days, pop culture was not the only vernacular in which the business of the nation was translated.

A present-tense culture is bound to be narcissistic, but, even so, its impregnability is impressive. Recently, Reebok was startled to be attacked by various women's groups for launching a new brand of footwear called "Incubus." It's not necessary to sub-

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scribe to the feminist argument that an incubus is a sort of prototype Clarence Thomas to wonder why, having spent a fortune on market research and focus groups and target testing, Reebok couldn't have given some intern fifteen bucks to go around the corner and buy a dictionary. Although most commentators described it as a Latin word, it's in my *Pocket Oxford*, quaintly considered part of the English language, albeit in the early pre-Ebonics phase of its development:

> INCUBUS *n.* oppressive person or thing; evil spirit visiting sleeper.

No doubt one day the company will unveil the Reebok Gulag: the word tested well with the focus groups, who agreed it evoked the sophisticated Continental chic they look for in a running shoe. Each night, it seems, the evil spirit steals upon our sleeping form and sucks away a little bit more of what we once took for granted.

Shortly after the basketball player Magic Johnson announced he was HIV positive, an "AIDS educator" appeared on the TV news and declared that her organization had been overwhelmed by callers anxious for information on "safe sex." Johnson's disclosure had so raised the public profile of the pandemic, she said, that to her and her coworkers it had become a kind of dividing line: A.M. and P.M. As she explained helpfully, A.M. stood for After Magic, P.M. for Pre-Magic. You might have expected *someone* in the office to say, "Hang on, in the normal course of the day doesn't P.M. come *after* A.M.? D'you think there's any reason for that?" I learned about ante meridiem and post meridiem at the age of seven, when, in an introduction to the classics, our teacher drew our attention to Latin phrases in everyday use. Until that news bulletin, it had never occurred to me that for others it might be the sort of rarefied arcana you'd have to do a BA in to ever stumble across.

In deference to that "educator," I think we should call this condition PMS—Post-Media Solipsism. The information superhighway seems to be a kind of giant rotary in which we go round and round colliding only with the other flotsam and jetsam of the here and now. For the most advanced case, look no further than the president during the 1996 campaign: "The last time I checked, the Constitution said, 'Of the people, by the people and for the people.' That's what the Declaration of Independence says."

Well, of course, he didn't check. He doesn't have to. The Declaration of Independence or the Gettysburg Address? What's the diff? Abe Lincoln? He's history. Indeed, the fate of Bob Dole's presidential candidacy, built on his poor doomed offer to be "the bridge to that better past," is instructive. When President Clinton, hijacking his opponent's metaphor, reconstructed it as "the bridge to the twenty-first century," he and his triangulating pollsters understood that a modern, electronic culture exists in a state of perpetual anticipation: even as the credits of your favorite sitcom start to roll, the screen consigns them to a tiny corner and a trailer commends the delights of the next, even funnier sitcom—or, as they say before the breaks on "Entertainment Tonight," the celebrity gossip magazine which so seamlessly follows the network news in most American cities, "Coming up! A minor character in a soap opera shoots her new swimsuit calendar—and ET has an exclusive preview!" (I quote from memory.) No matter that the item, by the time it arrives, seems barely longer than the clips and promos and teasers that have preceded it: by then something else will be coming up. When we reach that bridge to the twenty-first century, we'll be sitting in gridlock with the same old crack users, gangsta rappers, Indonesian caffeine addicts, and pre-op transsexual Hawaiian honeymooners, but by then the president will have moved on to the "new promise" of a bridge to the twenty-second century, or the fourth millennium, or a week next Tuesday—all coming up!

President Clinton is only the most bra-

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zenly fatuous co-opter, but these days all "forward-looking" states subscribe to the same philosophy: the past is something to be left behind. The members of the European Union, for example, are committed, by binding treaty, to "an ever closer union": in the end, therefore, efforts by British Conservative Euroskeptics to maintain, say, the United Kingdom's right to sell beer in imperial pints are bound to fail. The uniform metric Euro*stein* can be postponed, but never vanquished: forward momentum is a permanent constitutional condition of the Union. And when can it ever be deemed close enough?

Similarly, my native land, Canada, recently changed the motto on its coat of arms. After the flag, this is the second most visible formal emblem of the nation, embossed on the fronts of our passports and

The West's successful nations—which broadly speaking are the English-speaking ones—have somehow managed, in defiance of the old countryman's advice, to get here from there. It says much for the degree to which the obsession with novelty has infected every area of life that our institutions' longevity should now be their principal offense.

most official documents. Ever since the Dominion of Canada was established in 1867, the motto has read, "*A Mari usque ad Mare*"—from sea to sea. It's now being augmented by "*Desiderantes Meliorem Patriam*"—they desire a better country. Why not go all the way and just say "Canada—A Work in Progress"?

There was no parliamentary debate about the new motto: we just woke up one morning and discovered, thanks to a disgruntled opposition MP, that there it was. Brushing aside pedantic criticisms, the minister responsible said she couldn't see what all the fuss was about: they'd sent the proposed change to the Queen, she'd liked it and had been happy to approve it. This buck-passing was, in its way, even more shameless than the new motto: it's a fundamental constitutional practice in Commonwealth countries that the sovereign doesn't personally endorse the actions done in her name; they're the responsibility of her ministers. The disregard for constitutional proprieties, as much as the discarding of history, tells us much about the "better country" they so desire.

But then uneasy lies the head that wears the crown in a sound-bite culture. In Britain, forced to defend the monarchy from recent self-inflicted embarrassments, Conservative MPs tend to say things like, "Well, it's jolly good value for the money. The Royal Family brings an awful lot of tourism into the country." It's a pop culture response: Lady Di as a dysfunctional Minnie Mouse. But how else to explain it? The thinly veiled republicans on the Labor and Liberal benches tend to propose curtailing the Crown's powers or abolishing the House of Lords because, so they reason, if you were starting today, you'd never do it that way.

That's the point: we don't *need* to start today. The Liberal Party is resentful that the institutions of so many European countries seem more modern than Britain's, but that's because those nation states fail every generation or two and have to start from scratch. The West's successful nations—which broadly speaking are the English-speaking ones—have somehow managed, in defiance of the old countryman's advice, to get here from there. It says much for the degree to which the obsession with novelty has infected every area of life that our institutions' longevity should now be their principal offense. Progressive opinion, for example, has long held that British judges and barristers should abandon their wigs and robes because ordinary members of the public are unnerved by them.

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The condescension is exquisite: ordinary members of the public aren't unnerved by Elton John wearing a Versace dress in *The Sunday Times*, or Dennis Rodman and Mayor Giuliani. But we aren't surely such novelty junkies that we don't see the antiquated garb for what it really is: a reassurance—that the justice system predates the fads and fashions of the present day. In the Caribbean, the speakers of those tiny, British-derived island parliaments love their wigs and maces and copies of Hansard: they advertise, in stark contrast to their neighbors in Cuba, Haiti, and the Dominican Republic, their peaceful constitutional evolution. Unlike the American multiculturalists, they see no shame in acknowledging the origins of their institutions.

It's a different story in Canada. On the coat of arms, above the motto and below the crown, you'll see the English and Scottish lions, the Irish harp and the French *fleur-de-lis*. These four peoples built the Canadian state, on traditions inherited from home (parliamentary democracy) and institutions constructed on site (the Hudson's Bay Company, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the Canadian Pacific Railroad). One day, we'll wake up and they'll be gone, too. The official version of the modern state can be seen on the bus posters advertising the fiftieth anniversary of Canadian citizenship: "Canada—It Means the World to Us," and underneath stand representatives of every conceivable ethnic background holding hands around a globe as if they'd like to teach the world to sing in perfect harmoneeee.

A generation ago, Canada decided to reinvent itself as a round-the-clock Coke commercial, establishing a minister for multiculturalism and a Canadian Consultative Council of Multiculturalism. Many countries adapt and evolve and drift far away from their roots, but Canada, uniquely in the civilized world, simply junked its past. One reason I'm sympathetic to Francophone nationalism is that I think Quebeckers have a point: how can they trust Ottawa to protect French-Canadian culture when Ottawa couldn't even be bothered protecting English-Canadian culture? I happen to be an Irish-Belgian-Canadian, but it's absurd to maintain that the Irish contribution to Canadian history can be ranked no higher than the Belgian contribution. It's difficult even in a dictatorship convincingly to substitute a fiction for history: when its phoniness is self-evident, public cynicism is inevitable. The tragedy for Canada is that, when Quebec does leave, there'll be nothing left: they tore down the old Brittanic Dominion and couldn't find anything to put in its place.

Canada doesn't see it that way, admittedly. Its champions are forever trumpeting this or that United Nations survey showing that it's the best country in the world. The reason, obviously, is that Canada is the country that best approaches the condition of the United Nations. Far away from Canada, those peoples hung up on history are doomed as irredeemably recidivist: if only the Balkans would cease refighting their ancient quarrels; if only those Serb irregulars could be prized free from time-honored traditions like genital severing and just watch rock videos like normal people.

On a recent BBC documentary about Northern Ireland, after some footage of an Orangemen's pipe-and-drum marching band noisily commemorating some or other glorious victory of King Billy, the urbane English commentator remarked laconically, "Some of us wonder why can't the Unionists just pipe down?" If you dropped Belfast and Londonderry in the middle of the United States, they'd be two of the safest cities in the country, with annual murder rates that would tally up to an average weekend in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, or Gary, Indiana. But, because they're killing each other not in drug deals and drive-by shootings, liquor store holdups and domestic disputes but rather in an ongoing feud rooted in hundreds of years of history, it's deplored as a terrible tragedy. When President Clinton insists on his commitment to "advance" the peace process in

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Ulster, the British Government should politely inquire as to the murder rate in his own capital city. But they don't, of course: they, too, are wedded to their "initiatives," creatures of a culture where everything is always in play, up for grabs.

This idea of the nation as an ongoing one-way street is a curious one. To be sure, our most enduring stories are of epic journeys into the unknown, but they also involve returning to the certainties of home —not just in Homer (well named), but also in *The Lord of the Rings*, which several recent British literary surveys are touting as "the book of the century." To take a comparable American fable, for Dorothy the point of following the Yellow Brick Road was to get back to Kansas. Last November, Bob Dole wanted to get back to Kansas, while Bill Clinton believed we should follow the Yellow Brick Road for no other reason than that it leads away from where we are now. As the poet Thom Gunn wrote, shortly before moving from Britain to America, "You're always nearer by not keeping still."

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The question is: nearer to *what*? It's not so much that the pace of change is constantly accelerating as that change itself has changed. In the first half of this century, the pattern of our days altered drastically: we began to move about by cars, and airplanes, and to converse by telephone; the invention of the elevator spurred the invention of the skyscraper; electric lighting and refrigerators made the old lamp-lighter and the iceman redundant; self-raising flour and washing machines helped eliminate the need for domestic servants; the outhouse moved indoors. A young man, propelled by an H. G. Wells time machine from 1897 to 1947, would be flummoxed at every turn. By contrast, a young man, catapulted from 1947 to 1997, would, on the surface, feel instantly at home. In the second half of the century, hardly anything has changed: our bathrooms, our washers, our kitchens, our high-rises, our cars and planes have barely altered.

But, after a while, the young man from 1947 would begin to notice a few differences—not technological so much as psychological. Of a mind to take in a show or a movie, he might pick up *The Village Voice* or *The Boston Phoenix* and find himself confronted with pages of ads for unspecified services available by calling 1-900-287-SLUT, 1-800-890-TITS, or 1-800-333-ANAL. Even more than the fact that such services are freely—or rather expensively—available, he might be surprised to find himself in a world where, when a prospective customer calls the telephone company to set up a phone line or two and the service representative asks was there any particular number you had in mind and the customer inquires whether 1-888-GAY-REAR is still available, the phone company—the heirs of Alexander Graham Bell—says "1-888-GAY-REAR? No problem. It's yours, sir." (The numbers quoted are all real, so, if you dial them up, make sure you have a credit card handy.) Every invention has unintended consequences, but it's hard to avoid the suspicion that, after a century of continuous mechanization, the unintended consequences are the only ones left; the touch-tone phone has had a few peripheral benefits, but its principal effect, like that of so many others, is to nudge us further down the road to social isolation.

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The argument in favor of these novelties is usually a First Amendment one—that America's Founding Fathers had cannily foreseen the inventions of phone sex and gangsta rap and took great care to bequeath us their posthumous endorsement. The discovery of these and other latent rights is the constitutional equivalent of "If Shakespeare were alive today, he'd be writing 'Baywatch'": it depends on the theory of continuous forward propulsion, and the assumption that there are no absolutes, no standards; there can be no lines drawn in the sands of time. If you venture unease about Snoop Doggy Dogg singing "Don't muthafuck with me, you muthafucker," you'll be told that ah, yes, but once upon a time the waltz was considered shocking.

When C. Delores Tucker and William Bennett met with Time Warner to protest the company's involvement in gangsta rap, one executive responded, "Elvis was more controversial in his day than some rap lyrics are today." In a way, that's even more alarming—for it presupposes that pretty soon we'll get used to Snoop and 2Pac and the Notorious B.I.G. and that one day at the Elks' or the Legion hall we'll raise a glass to Irv and Mildred's fiftieth anniversary and they'll whirl out on the floor as the band plays that old favorite they used to dance to when they were courting: "Yo, Bitch! Sit on This." And we'll all sigh, "Ah, why don't they write 'em like they used to?" and moan about what the kids are listening to today. If in forty years we've gone from Elvis to the Dogg, where will we be in another forty years, or even twenty?

Throughout this century, American innovation has been brash and raucous—as it was (though it's hard to believe) in the British Empire at its zenith. But, underneath the noise, there were certain assumptions. In 1934, for example, there was a pop hit called "Love Is Just Around the Corner," whose middle section ran:

> Venus de Milo
> Was noted for her charms
> Strictly between us
> You're cuter than Venus
> And what's more you've got arms.

This isn't some chichi showtune; it was a big song in a popular movie and it became a best-selling record for Bing Crosby. Its authors, Ralph Rainger and Leo Robin, are unknown outside the songwriting community. But, back in 1934, Robin could make mention in a pop song of the Venus de Milo and he and his publisher and the movie's producer could all be confident that, somewhere at the back of their minds, most listeners would have a hazy image of a statue with its arms missing.

Songs and jokes are our common currency, the most reliable guide to what it is we share. Not so long ago, a vaudevillian, reacting to a novelty song that had fallen a little flat, could chide his audience, "I see that you have Van Gogh's ear for music"; a TV variety show would include a sketch that ran: "Coming to the pub, Franz Schubert?" "Not tonight, I have to stay in and finish my symphony," etc. You can find a thousand similar references in the popular culture of sixty years ago, but not now. These aren't the deliberately obscure allusions to William Burroughs buried on 1960s concept albums, but a kind of casual cultural vocabulary that assumes that someone who digs swing bands and gangster movies can be relied upon to have a certain elementary recognition of the "classics"—great novels and old masters and classical music: the "canon" extended even unto Crosby lyrics.

True, there were those who had forgotten or never learned what the Venus de Milo or Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony was, but they tended to feel sheepish about such lapses. You rarely came across fellows like the Hispanic rapper being interviewed on TV a year or two back who claimed that he didn't want to learn 'bout no George Washington 'cuz George Washington had no relevance to him. As it happens, I'm not ill-disposed toward Hispanic rap, taking the view that rap, like opera, tends to be most agreeable in a language one doesn't understand. But someone should point out to the

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chap that George Washington and a few other dead white males of no relevance are the reasons that he finds it more congenial to pursue his calling as a Hispanic rapper in Los Angeles rather than Guatemala City. Still, why blame him when the Federal government itself is happy to wipe the birthdays of Washington and Lincoln off the calendar and merge them into that big nothing, Presidents' Day? Washington? He's history.

The argument in favor of these novelties is usually a First Amendment one—that America's Founding Fathers had cannily foreseen the inventions of phone sex and gangsta rap and took great care to bequeath us their posthumous endorsement. It depends on the theory of continuous forward propulsion, and the assumption that there are no absolutes, no standards.

By such criteria, very little history is "relevant." Today, the word "classics" is applied not to Greek and Latin but to early Stones cuts or some newly discovered digitally remastered episodes of "The Beverly Hillbillies." In lieu of real, living history, it's possible to live in ersatz history twenty-four hours a day, tuned to finely targeted radio stations offering round-the-clock hits from, according to taste, the Sixties, Seventies, Eighties, or even the late Seventies/early Eighties—part of the virtual ghettos that have risen up instead of the dreaming spires of Marshall McLuhan's promised global village.

Traditional societies appear like icebergs: beneath the surface, there's the unseen seven-eighths, the shared history on which the top eighth sits. When William Mann of the London *Times* became the first critic to write seriously about The Beatles, he did so by banging on about "aeolian cadences" and similar terms. He felt that, if you were going to argue the musical merits of the Fab Four, you had to submit them to the same technical analysis as you would Schubert. For his pains, John Lennon dismissed Mann as a "bullshitter." Offering an alternative explanation, Paul McCartney said, "There are always two things we do when we sit down to write a song. First we sit down. Then we write a song."

Thirty years later, the Mann model has all but vanished. A critic or a professor—for these things are now the province of the academy—cannot (as Wilfred Mellers once did) compare The Beatles with Schubert, because he has no very clear idea of what Schubert did. Mann's successor in the *Times*, David Sinclair, writes of the trio Rapeman:

> Albini favors a thin, scratchy guitar sound, massively overcranked to deliver squalls of feedback . . . Solos unfold like so much sonic splatter. . . . Albini's singing is a rabidly incoherent, hysterical shriek that brings a number of the songs to the verge of self-destruction.

In case you haven't twigged, Sinclair's giving the boys a rave. One can only admire, he decides, Rapeman's "high degree of individual musicianship," not to mention "the scalpel-sharp sense of purpose to which it is harnessed." For Mann, if The Beatles merited a place in the canon, they had to submit to the same admission criteria as Brahms or Wolf. For Mann's successors, rock criticism is arguably one of the most seminal things since the last arguably seminal thing a couple of days ago.

The London *Times*, like *The New York Times* and most other papers, has exhaustive coverage of rock music, but very little of it has to do with "aeolian cadences." The bottom seven-eighths of the iceberg has melted away and what's left bobs around on the

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water alluding only to itself—rock 'n' movies 'n' Calvin Klein ads 'n' junk food 'n' Clinton jokes . . . Moreover, in this present-tense culture, the occasional forays down the highbrow end are even more unconvincing than Mellers and Mann were.

All of our ancient institutions are vulnerable in a media age: when everything is brand-new, up-to-the-minute or, at any rate, all-improved and excitingly relaunched, what's the point of anything whose authority derives from the fact that it was around before you were born?

When Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Harvard Professor of English and Afro-American Studies, was called as an expert witness in the obscenity trial of 2 Live Crew, he cited, as an example of the respectable poetic tradition of explicit sexual imagery, "Shakespeare's 'My Love is like a red, red rose.'" No reporter, even assuming he'd spotted it, was tactless enough to mention that the Professor's quoted line comes not from the Bard but Robbie Burns. But who cares? "A rose is a rose is a rose," as Gertrude Lawrence famously said. Robbie Burns? He's history.

Across the swamp of our know-nothing culture, the Harvard Professor reaches lazily out to the Hispanic rapper, wallowing in the mud like two dozey hippos. All of our ancient institutions are vulnerable in a media age: when everything is brand-new, up-to-the-minute or, at any rate, all-improved and excitingly relaunched, what's the point of anything whose authority derives from the fact that it was around before you were born? For the Royal Family, the solution was to tiptoe gingerly into the shallow end of modern celebrity: Their Royal Highnesses the Duke and Duchess of York and the Prince Edward agreed to be team captains on a Royal game show; a decade later, Prince Edward is a TV producer, the Duchess does commercials for Ocean Spray cranberry juice, and the Duke spends much of his time denying he has AIDS.

For the Church of England, the solution was to try to get a bit more with-it, daddio: the Bishop of Durham, apparently a born-again doubter, described the Resurrection as "basically a sort of conjuring trick with bones"; less elevated clergy have held "Raves for Jesus" and introduced cardboard Clap-O-Meters into their churches so that, when Our Lord's name is mentioned, we applaud vigorously and the Vicar moves the arrow round to the top category—"Pure Dead Brilliant!!" But the Church and State have made their feeble accommodations with pop culture mostly for reasons of self-doubt or strategy. Only Professor Gates and co. have chosen to go over to the other side with such gusto—hipper than thou, cooler than thou, more pure dead brilliant than thou. It's not that pop stars want to be intellectuals, but that intellectuals want to be pop stars—a uniquely contemporary crisis. The threat to the European past comes not from mass vulgarization but from elite vulgarization. The most popular forms of contemporary culture—"Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman," *The Bridges of Madison County*, Whitney Houston and Céline Dion ballads—are unchanged in their bourgeois sentimental efficiency from their equivalents a hundred years ago. What's different is that, whereas a century ago our betters were telling us to put down our parlor ballads for Mozart and Beethoven, now they tell us we should be listening to Rapeman or Suicide.

Conservatives are fond of quoting Cicero: "To know nothing of what happened before you were born is to remain ever a child." But what works as a put-down in Cicero's day isn't necessarily as effective in ours: one of the reasons we're not interested in anything that happened before we were born is precisely because we want to remain

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ever children. That would certainly appear to be the principle on which modern society operates. Mass culture is not democratic culture: it values certain groups over others. The music industry and motion pictures devote the bulk of their product to the young; TV advertisers prefer shows that attract a young demographic, presumably because those audiences are more susceptible

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to the unceasing swirl of pointless and interchangeable novelties on which a present-tense culture depends; last year, *The New York Times* reported with dismay that according to an NEA survey on the "graying" of arts audiences, the average age of theatergoers at five Broadway shows was 40.2 years. Given that American life expectancy is in the mid-seventies and that any four-year-old kid who wants to spend his evenings at Sondheim musicals ought to be in therapy, I'd say that figure was about smack dab where it should be. In essence, the *Times* and the NEA are fretting that Americans are too elderly for their art forms' preferred image.

But it's also true that as big a factor in the dismal immaturity of contemporary culture is our swollen academe. America now confers annually almost five times the number of degrees it bestowed in 1950; its college population is twice the size of its high school population; by 1993, to earn a bachelor's degree took on average 6.29 years. Yet President Clinton apparently won't be satisfied until *every* American goes to college. Possibly he has in mind the German model, which is rapidly approaching the point at which the average able-bodied male completes his education at thirty-nine, pursues the career for which he's been so thoroughly prepared for a couple of years and then takes early retirement at forty-two.

To what disciplines are these multitudes of elderly students submitting? None, naturally. Like so much of our arts and entertainments, the principal purpose is to defer adulthood. More college students means perhaps a teensy bit more Shakespeare but, sure as night follows day, or A.M. follows P.M., lots more Maya Angelou, more Rigoberta Menchu, more Afrocentrism, more Tarantino studies, women's studies, queer studies, transgender studies. . . . Certainly, multiculturalism doesn't extend to knowing the capital of Malaysia or the principal exports of South Africa. We have far more education at far greater cost than ever before, yet we are conspicuously less educated. If Bill Clinton seriously wishes to be remembered as the "education president," he might consider introducing a mandatory Federal school-leaving age of twelve.

In Vermont, the Supreme Court has just declared the state's funding of education unconstitutional on the grounds that one cannot have "equality of opportunity" if some towns are prepared to spend nine thousand dollars per pupil while others spend only six thousand. The system which sustained America's education for most of its history is, apparently, illegal. It seems self-evidently banal, given the money America's thrown at the public school system in recent years, to measure education by the size of the budget. A hundred years ago, we took a different view: the voters hired the teacher and boarded him out to the lowest bidder within the district; no hidden costs there. The trouble with Vermont's decision is that every movement toward statewide or Federal education systems is to the advantage of the teachers' unions and delivers the elementary schools further into the hands of the same people

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who've demolished the universities, people who seem determined to reduce the past to three or four ongoing grievance disputes. In some schools, they're already there. In San Francisco, you can't pray or sing hymns but every child gets to help make the banner for the Gay Pride parade.

President Clinton's answer to the woes of education is the Internet: he's committed to wiring up every classroom, whether it wants to be or not. Heaven knows why. Children don't exactly need to be encouraged to switch on their computers and other electronic toys, so it would be heartening to think that, for at least a few hours a day, they might be cajoled into opening a book. Besides, Mr. Clinton's optimism flies in the face of even recent history. Radio was supposed to be an educational tool: it started in the early Twenties with serious talks and live drama from the Provincetown Players and "The American School of the Air"; today, it's a jukebox. TV was supposed to be an educational tool: it began with Leonard Bernstein explaining symphonic construction in prime time; today, it's a freakshow. Who seriously doubts that the Internet will follow the same trajectory? Pubescent boys, up in their rooms downloading Teri Hatcher all night, have already got the measure of the thing.

As that last kindergarten class trooped out of our academy building, many of them descendants of its very first class a century and a half earlier, it was hard not to feel that this next generation is the biggest experiment of all, caught between an omnipresent commercial culture which despises the past and an intellectual establishment which seeks to annex it for its own purposes. We should cherish those small-town Memorial Day and Fourth of July celebrations where nervous third graders in stovepipe hats and false beards recite the Gettysburg Address. Unlike our president, they can still be bothered to check. The past? It's history.

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The age of the émigrés

by Hilton Kramer

Although the role played by European émigrés in reshaping American cultural life in the 1930s and 1940s has long been recognized in this country as an historical development of immense intellectual consequence, the exhibition which Stephanie Barron has organized at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art this spring under the title "Exiles and Emigrés: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler,"[1] is the first event of its kind to concentrate on the work these artists produced during their period of exile and its impact on American thinking about art. In the exhibition's book-length catalogue, the scope of the inquiry is expanded to encompass some of the émigré writers, musicians, art historians, art dealers, and museum curators who also exerted a significant influence on modern cultural life in this country. In both the exhibition and its ambitious catalogue we are thus recalled to a period that effected one of the greatest transformations in the life of art in this country—including its public life in the museums, the schools, and the media—in our entire history. There is a sense in which it can truly be said that it wasn't until the age of the émigrés in the Thirties and Forties that American cultural life was brought into alignment with the imperatives of the kind of intellectual modernity that had dominated the high culture of Europe since the turn of the century.

The age of the émigrés was also a period that eventually brought an enormous change in the art life of Western Europe, which, as the result of this enforced emigration and its influence, found itself for the first time in its history obliged to regard the United States as a rival in shaping the course of contemporary artistic thought. What we owed this momentous change to was not, of course, an American initiative —not at the outset, anyway. Its principal cause was the totalitarian catastrophe visited upon Europe first by Lenin and Stalin and then by Hitler—a political catastrophe that was also a culture war which effectively uprooted the modernist movement in the arts from its places of origin in Europe and made its survival dependent upon exile in foreign and especially American venues.

It wasn't only to the United States, to be sure, that European émigré artists fled this catastrophe. Vasily Kandinsky, after departing the debacle of the avant-garde in the Soviet Union in 1922 to join the Bauhaus in Germany, was obliged to quit that haven in

1 "Exiles and Emigrés: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler" opened at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art on February 23, 1997, and remains on view through May 11. The show will travel to the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (June 19–September 7, 1997) and the Neue Nationalgaleric, Berlin (October 9, 1997–January 4, 1998). A catalogue of the exhibition, by Stephanie Barron with Sabine Eckmann, has been published by the Los Angeles County Museum of Art and Harry N. Abrams (432 pages, $75; $35 paper).

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1933 when Hitler shut down the Bauhaus, and lived out his final years of exile in France—the last four of those years in a France occupied by the Nazis. Kurt Schwitters found refuge from the Nazis first in Norway, then in England, which also harbored Oskar Kokoschka. Max Beckmann found his refuge in Amsterdam before emigrating to America at the end of the Second World War. Still others escaped to Mexico, Canada, Palestine (as it then was), even China. But it was inevitably to the greater safety, freedom, and professional opportunities of the United States that the majority of these émigrés made their way when permitted to do so in the 1930s and early 1940s.

The principal figures upon whom the "Exiles and Emigrés" exhibition concentrates are, in addition to those already named here, artists who emigrated to America—Marc Chagall, Jacques Lipchitz, Piet Mondrian, Fernand Léger, Yves Tanguy, Salvador Dali, Max Ernst, André Masson, Matta Echaurren, Josef Albers, László Moholy-Nagy, George Grosz, Lyonel Feininger, the photographers André Kertész and Andreas Feininger, and the architects Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, and Marcel Breuer.

In the catalogue of the exhibition, in addition to material devoted to these figures, there is also an essay by Kevin Parker on the two most illustrious émigré art historians of the period—Richard Krautheimer and Erwin Panofsky—and Lawrence Weschler's essay entitled "Paradise: The Southern California Idyll of Hitler's Cultural Exiles," which touches on the émigré careers of, among other celebrated figures, Arnold Schönberg, Thomas Mann, Franz Werfel and Alma Mahler-Werfel, Bertolt Brecht, Otto Klemperer, and Max Reinhardt. (There are even maps showing where these émigré eminences resided during their California exile.) This is far from an exhaustive list of the distinguished émigré artists and intellectuals who came to America in this period. To cite two very different examples: neither the exhibition nor its catalogue does justice to the role of André Breton in New York art life in the early 1940s, and a career like that of Hannah Arendt—far more influential on American thought than, say, Marc Chagall or George Grosz—lies beyond the scope of "Exiles and Emigrés." Still, even with these and other omissions duly acknowledged, the roster of talent in this survey is quite extraordinary.

In fact, nothing quite like this rapid and highly concentrated infusion of avant-garde European art and thought into the advanced purlieux of American cultural life had ever before occurred in our history in such a short time and under such extreme conditions—conditions that did much to enhance the reception of ideas that would have been more easily resisted in a less tumultuous time. It hardly mattered that some of these émigré artists—George Grosz, for example, and Salvador Dali—were already well on their way to an irreversible decline when they arrived on these shores. Others—Josef Albers and Mies van der Rohe—would create their finest work and exert their strongest influence in the American phase of their careers. All in various ways and to different degrees contributed something vital, if only by their presence and their professional histories, to the radically altered atmosphere in which American artists and intellectuals now found themselves having, perforce, to think about their respective vocations in new ways and adjust their ambitions to a new scale of achievement.

Certain ideas fostered by the émigré artists—the concept of automatism promoted by Surrealists as the very key to creativity, for example, and the very different notion of an impersonal abstraction advanced by Mondrian—proved to be fundamental in the formation of the New York School, the single most important American art movement to emerge from this encounter with the avant-garde culture of the émigrés. Yet something less tangible but more imperative than a pictorial style or specific debts of artistic influence—a new sense of historical

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possibility—proved to be an even greater consequence of the émigré influence. For the first time, that is, it looked as if American art might become, instead of a dependency of the modernist movement, its principal heir—a belief that could only have been born at a moment when Europe was plunged into the darkness of war and postwar disarray. Looking back on this period with his usual mixture of nostalgia and hyperbole, Robert Motherwell later remembered it this way: "The art scene was parochial. No one thought that we could ever produce truly great modern painting; only Europeans could. So we had nothing to lose by risking all. A time of innocence in American painting; a now lost innocence that cannot be recovered."

A time of innocence? It's an odd way—a peculiarly American way, perhaps—to speak of the war years, which brought so much death, destruction, and spiritual ruin in their wake, not only to those who fought in the war but to the many more who saw in the war—correctly as it turned out—the extinction of the world they knew and the hopes they had cherished for it. Yet there is a sense in which it is true that for many of the American artists who found their vocation in the war years it *was* a time of innocence. For the senior members of the New York School, certainly, it marked a rebirth of artistic aspiration—a release from the moribund sentiments and conventions that had thitherto blocked their development.

For the émigrés, of course, it was a period of enforced furlough from the war, which in many cases would have meant certain death had they remained at home. For them, emigration was not only a reprieve from a death sentence but a release from having to bear responsibility for anything but their art. This was an attitude that came more easily to the European émigrés, for whom membership in the avant-garde had always been a form of internal emigration from the societies that had produced them, than to their American contemporaries. As artists in America, no matter what their aesthetic persuasion, the latter may at times have felt themselves to be exiles in their own country, but traditionally they lacked the kind of fully developed artistic subculture that could provide them with any equivalent form of internal emigration. The gift—if we choose to regard it as such—which the European émigrés bestowed on the aspiring talents of the New York School was precisely this license to become internal émigrés in their own culture, and the culture responded to this withdrawal with precisely the kind of incomprehension and indignation that confirmed the necessity of the very thing it disapproved of. It was in this sense that the New York School became, under the tutelage of its émigré masters, the first—and alas, the last—full-fledged European-style avant-garde in American art.

This moment of "innocence," if we can still call it that, was not to last, however. In neither art nor life is it usually possible for innocence to survive the seductions of its own success. By the 1950s, the period of internal emigration for the New York School was over as the movement and its first-generation luminaries—now joined by a second generation determined to enjoy the fruits of its victories—acquired the attributes and privileges of a cultural establishment. All of the agencies that presided over the public life of art in America—the museums, the schools, the media, and the market, which had either resisted the movement or regarded it with curiosity and condescension—emerged as its ardent partisans and supporters. What had only a few years earlier been looked upon as avant-garde—and therefore suspicious and somehow "foreign"—was now considered mainstream. At Harvard in the spring of 1951, I heard Motherwell lecture to a hall packed with students and faculty, and no one was shocked to hear him compare the paintings of Mark Rothko to Van Gogh's, the latter being one of the few modern masters the audience was certain to be acquainted with, if only in reproduction. I doubt if there were a dozen people in the audience that

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day who had ever seen a painting by Mark Rothko—or Motherwell, either. In those days, Harvard was somewhat backward in that respect, but as the 1950s unfolded that, too, would change.

It remained for the European avant-garde to perform one last service for the New York School: its certification as a bona fide avant-garde in its own right. This occurred in the later 1950s when the Museum of Modern Art sent major exhibitions—most notably, "The New American Painting" show and a Jackson Pollock retrospective—on a tour of European museums. Postwar Europe, otherwise so egregiously anti-American in its cultural and political pieties, responded to these exhibitions with unmistakable rapture. Much nonsense was written about the art itself, of course, which was sometimes taken to be the work of cowboys on the old frontier—a consequence, no doubt, of an immersion in too many Hollywood movies, which, with jazz, were often the only examples of contemporary American culture that met with ungrudging approval in Europe.

But this critical nonsense didn't matter. What mattered was the approval and praise, which had the effect of conferring on the New York School the kind of European imprimatur which American modernist art still needed to make its ascent into the upper reaches of the international art market. By that time, the age—and the ethos—of the émigrés was little more than a memory, a memory of an "innocence" that, as Motherwell said, could not be recovered. Internal emigration had been succeeded by the privileges and power and deformations of the limelight. The way had been cleared for, among much else, the emergence of Pop Art, which, whatever else might be said of it, had little in common with the agon of the émigré experience.

In the "Exiles and Emigrés" exhibition in Los Angeles, this crucial chapter in the history of modern art—as much a chapter of European as of American history—isn't given quite the measure of attention its importance merits. In only a single installation, albeit a very striking one—a replication (on a smaller scale, of course) of the Surrealist environment in Peggy Guggenheim's Art of This Century gallery, designed by émigré architect Frederick Kiesler in New York in 1942—are newcomers to the subject given a hint of the larger historical drama that I have been attempting to describe here. Nor is there, in the exhibition's catalogue, a sufficient account of the differing fates that had overtaken the modern movement in Europe and America in the period under review.[2]

In the 1930s, when the geographical scale of the modern movement was radically diminished in Europe under the pressure of the totalitarian ban on modernism, the United States witnessed the emergence of important new institutions—most particularly the Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York—that were, in their different ways, specifically created to accommodate the achievements of modernism. It was owing (in part, anyway) to the existence of these new institutions—and especially the Modern under the leadership of Alfred H. Barr, Jr.—that the United States was able to respond as well as it did to the plight of the European émigrés. Barr is certainly given his due in "Exiles and Emigrés," but the larger picture as far as the museums are concerned tends to remain a little blurry.

Never mind, "Exiles and Emigrés" does much to enlarge our understanding of this remarkable chapter of our—and Europe's—history. The fact that the exhibition will not be seen in New York City, where so much of the history it recounts took place, is something of a scandal in itself, a reminder perhaps of how little sense of respect our museums have for their own historical past.

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2 See my article on "The Modern Movement on the Eve of the Second World War," in *The American Scholar* for spring 1982.

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The distinguished professor

by Roger Kimball

Every educational system has a moral goal that it tries to attain and that informs its curriculum. It wants to produce a certain kind of human being.
—Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*

Back in the days when I was sleeping with students, all the sex had taken place within a larger context of social and personal relations.
—Jane Gallop, Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee

Last Spring, when the trendy, neo-Marxist quarterly *Social Text* unwittingly published "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity"—a piece of deliberate, postmodernist nonsense by the physicist Alan Sokal—enough intellectual shame was generated to cover the entire pseudo-discipline of "cultural studies."[1]

Shame, but not, alas, embarrassment. Andrew Ross, the editor chiefly responsible for publishing Mr. Sokal's brazen gibberish, ought to have stolen away at midnight and taken up llama farming somewhere in the mountains of Peru. After all, he had just been duped into accepting an essay arguing (among other absurdities) "that physical 'reality,' no less than social 'reality,' is at bottom a social and linguistic construct." But here he is still, watching television, listening to rock music (in an interview in *New York* magazine a few years back, Professor Ross explained that he had more or less given up on books), and enjoying his expensive, tenured position as head of New York University's American Studies Program.

Administrators at New York University ought to have been embarrassed, too. After all, they have employed and coddled an obvious charlatan like Andrew Ross, luring him away from Princeton, putting him in charge of an important academic program, and entrusting him with the education of untold scores of undergraduates. But there's been nary a peep from NYU: no sign of chagrin, no hint of contrition, no condign display of mortification. I suppose that as long as unsuspecting parents are willing to hand over those fat tuition checks, no dean or provost at NYU much cares what goes on in the name of education: night is day, black is white, "physical 'reality' . . . is a social and linguistic construct." It's all the same to them.

And then there is Duke University Press, which publishes *Social Text*. By rights, the officers and directors of a distinguished university press ought to have been acutely embarrassed by what, from Melbourne to Malibu, has come to be called the Sokal Affair. But as anyone who follows the academic scene knows, Duke University has long since lost the capacity for embarrassment. For more than a decade, its literature

1 For an account of this hoax, see "Professor Sokal's Transgression" in the Notes & Comments of *The New Criterion* for June 1996.

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and humanities departments have been among the primary sources of the poisonous ideas and hermetic, politicized verbiage that have so disfigured liberal education at the end of the twentieth century. It is grimly appropriate that the chief architect of Duke's *dégringolade*, the literature professor Stanley Fish, should turn out to be executive director of the Duke University Press. For Professor Fish, a prominent Milton scholar turned academic buffoon, is so inured to embarrassment that he is willing to say anything to enhance his celebrity and extend his academic fiefdom. So it was that when the Sokal Affair broke, Professor Fish rushed off an op-ed piece to *The New York Times* arguing that "it is Alan Sokal, not his targets, who threatens to undermine the intellectual standards he vows to protect."

I had reason to recall all this recently when a friend brought to my attention a story from the March 7 issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* about *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*, a new book by a publicity-seeking feminist named Jane Gallop and published by Duke University Press.[2] At first I suspected that this story, too, was a gigantic hoax: there were just too many academic clichés in one place. Could the author of the story in the *Chronicle* really be named Courtney Leatherman? Given the contemporary academic obsession with all forms of outré sex, "Leatherman" seemed too good to be true. Above all, there was Miss Gallop herself. This Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee had begun her academic career with—what else?—a dissertation about that great writer, the Marquis de Sade. In her new book, as the *Chronicle* reports, Distinguished Professor Gallop recounts her travails when two of her female graduate students—one of whom she French kissed at a lesbian bar in front of many other students—accused her of sexually harassing them. (To be specific, one of the students complained that Distinguished Professor Gallop had "mashed her lips against mine and shoved her tongue in my mouth.") A look at the book confirmed what the story in the *Chronicle* suggests: that it is essentially a work of sexual exhibitionism masquerading as a meditation on the meaning of feminism and the virtues of consensual sexual relations between teachers and students.

I shall return to Distinguished Professor Gallop and her opus in a moment. But first a detour in the direction of her publisher Duke University Press. The story in the *Chronicle* noted that Duke had such faith in the sensation the book would make that they devoted the cover of their Spring/Summer catalogue to it. And indeed, there it is: a woman intently reading a take-off on the *National Enquirer* with "Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment" and a likeness of Distinguished Professor Gallop splashed on the cover.

Leafing through the Duke catalogue, I gained a new appreciation of the difficult decisions that Professor Fish and others running the press must face. To be sure, Distinguished Professor Gallop's book is subacademic sensationalistic trash. It might reasonably be expected to garner some small attention and even to sell a few copies. But is it really any more sensationalistic or barren of intellectual merit than other titles on the Duke list? What fine instruments of discrimination they must possess! How could they know that Distinguished Professor Gallop's book would do better than *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship*, for example, which the Duke catalogue recommends as "a devastating critique of contemporary discourses of American citizenship [that] addresses the triumph of the idea of private life borne in the right-wing agenda of the Reagan revolution"? Or how about *Public Privates: Performing Gynecology from Both Ends of the Speculum*? The author of this important contribution to civilization, we

2 *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*, by Jane Gallop; Duke University Press, 101 pages, $29.95; $10.95 paper.

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read, removes "gynecology from its private cover within clinic walls and medical textbook pages [and] decodes the gynecological exam, seizing on its performative dimension." Then there is *Wet: On Painting, Feminism, and Art Culture* by Mira Schor, which "brings a maverick perspective and provocative voice to the issues of contemporary painting, gender representation, and feminist art." The catalogue, alas, does not include a likeness of the book's jacket, which turns out to feature *Slit of Paint*, a graphic—pornographic, really—representation of labia painted by the author ("oil on canvas," in case you were wondering).

The Duke catalogue contains other delights: books on Marxism, gay studies, AIDS, gender theory, postcolonial theory: all those attractive items that substitute for genuine scholarship at the best university presses these days. It is the perfect list, really, for the publisher of *Social Text*: intentional or unintended, just about everything new they publish is some kind of hoax. But the primary dupes, as the current catalogue reminds us, are usually the public and what once upon a time could unironically be called the scholarly community.

Which brings me back to Distinguished Professor Gallop and her latest contribution to letters. She is quite frank, both in the interview in the *Chronicle* and in her new book, about wanting to create a "spectacle," a "sensation." Hence, for example, the tabloidlike title of the book: *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*.

At the center of Distinguished Professor Gallop's book is her belief that there is some deep irony about the fact that she, a self-declared feminist, should be accused of sexual harassment. For her, the idea of a feminist sexual harasser "seems like a contradiction in terms." After all, we usually think of sexual harassment as a predatory male activity, and feminists, of course, are by definition neither male nor predatory. Q.E.D. One of the most common phrases in this book—in all of her books, I'd wager—is "As a feminist . . ." (Another is "my sexuality," but more about that anon.) For Distinguished Professor Gallop, feminism is more than a political principle, it is a patent of moral vigor and existential authenticity. Just as certain Marxists profess to believe that, because they mouth support for the downtrodden and oppressed, they could not, as Marxists, be guilty of oppressing people, so Distinguished Professor Gallop seems to believe that, being a sexually emancipated feminist, she could not possibly be guilty of sexual harassment. The interview in the *Chronicle* puts this succinctly: "While Ms. Gallop acknowledges the power she has over her students, she says that her power, as a feminist, is different from a man's. She says, for example, that as a woman she could never neglect to take seriously the work of a female student." Is this breathtakingly naïve? Or merely self-serving? And which would be worse in a Distinguished Professor of English and Comparative Literature?

Twisting a line from Tolstoy, Irving Howe and his coterie of Marxists were fond of declaring that "Socialism is the name of our desire." "Feminism" is the name of Distinguished Professor Gallop's desire. In her book, she takes us back to her college days in the early 1970s. "As a good soldier in the sexual revolution," she explains, "I had sex often, but with little pleasure and no orgasms." Then she discovered Simone de Beauvoir: "In January 1971 I read de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*, learned that women could masturbate, and had my first orgasm." As Miss Manners might say, how nice for her.

A large part of Distinguished Professor Gallop's book is taken up with tales of her sexual exploits. Readers of her other books will not find this surprising. Distinguished Professor Gallop likes talking about her—well, I was going to say her "private life," but there is nothing private about it. In *Thinking Through the Body*, for example, a collection of essays published in 1988, she explains that one of the essays, "The Student Body," had originally borne the dedication: "Aux hommes de trente-six ans" because "I had had a series of affairs with

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thirty-six-year-old men (at the time I was in my mid-twenties)." All of these men, she cheerfully informs us, were officially "unavailable": some were married, some were her professors, and so on. (Perhaps I should warn readers that the cover of *Thinking Through the Body* features a photograph, taken by Distinguished Professor Gallop's husband, of her giving birth to their son Max.)

In *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*, after Distinguished Professor Gallop learns that women can masturbate (it's amazing what one can pick up from books), she tells her readers about a weekend-long feminist event on her college campus. She describes an all-female party that took place that glorious weekend, and how she and her new-found sisters stripped off their shirts and danced bare-breasted in "bacchanalian frenzy": "I remember Becca that night, a gorgeous young woman a year or so older than me. . . . she was the first to take off her shirt and start dancing. . . . I was dancing with those beautiful breasts, dancing all the harder because I so wanted to touch those breasts." Etc.

When it comes to sex, Distinguished Professor Gallop is what we might call an equal opportunity employer. In graduate school, she set her cap for her dissertation advisers. Both proved recalcitrant. At last, however, "the year I was writing my thesis, I finally managed to have sex with them (each separately, to be sure but, oddly, coincidentally, in the same week)." Although she does not mention either of these gentlemen by name, one of them was Richard Klein, a well-known professor of Romance languages at Cornell. As the *Chronicle* story explains, Professor Klein felt "outed" when Duke University Press asked him to write a blurb for *Feminist Accused of Sexual Harassment*. He readily complied. "For decades," Professor Klein wrote, "I have felt guilt and shame for having performed toward her in a way that was unprofessional, exploitative, and lousy in bed. Her book has convinced me, with the cogency of its feminist arguments and the persuasiveness of her personal testimony, that she, on her side, feels only gratitude and admiration for my performance." I am happy to share Professor Klein's frank assessment with readers, because they will not find it on Distinguished Professor Gallop's book or the accompanying press material: as Professor Klein explains, Duke rejected his blurb.

Distinguished Professor Gallop is not burdened by the sort of scruples that dogged Professor Klein. At her first academic job, long before she became a distinguished professor, she began by sleeping with an unnamed graduate student. ("Graduate students," she once declared at a conference, "are my sexual preference.") When this fellow tired of her company, she found consolation with an undergraduate named Scott. Scott, you see, had learned that the other fellow had up and left. He came to visit. "His idea was to cheer me up by sleeping with me. I was glad he came by and immediately took to the idea." Then there was the lesbian couple Micki and Diane. Micki came by one day and "I was thrilled to let her seduce me." About a year later, "Diane found occasion to invite me to spend the night with her. . . . I was extremely flattered and more than happy to accept her invitation."

Although Distinguished Professor Gallop is careful to tell us that she has not slept with her students since 1982 when, one gathers, she got married, she makes it clear that her new-found continence has nothing to do with any scruples about student-teacher sexual relations: "Prohibitions against teacher-student relations seem based in a sense of sex as inherently bad." Or again: "Telling teachers and students that we must not engage each other sexually ultimately tells us that . . . we *should not treat each other as human beings*."

There is of course something deeply pathetic about all this. Jane Gallop is a casualty of the deceptive liberations of the Sixties: an obviously bright girl who was ruined, intellectually and morally, by the emancipation-

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ist ethos of that destructive era. She defiantly tells us that "it is because of the sort of feminist I am that I do not respect the line between the intellectual and the sexual." She does not see that by not respecting that line she has trivialized both sex and intellect. Defending her pursuit of her dissertation advisers, she informs us that "screwing these guys definitely did not keep me from taking myself seriously as a student."

In fact, Distinguished Professor Gallop never seems to have had much trouble taking herself seriously. On the contrary, it is taking anything *but* herself seriously that has proved difficult. Describing the work of one of the women who later accused her of sexual harassment, Distinguished Professor Gallop explains that the student wrote a paper that "interwove love letters to an unnamed woman with an analysis of my own recent scholarly book, which contains a discussion of love letters between women." What did Distinguished Professor Gallop think was going on in that poor student's mind? And what, indeed, of her own "scholarly" work? Let's return for a moment to *Thinking Through the Body*. Like so much academic work in the humanities today, this book is positively obsessed with sex and is festooned with sexual puns. In "Lip Service," an essay we are told is "central" to the collection, Distinguished Professor Gallop expatiates on the views of the French feminist Luce Irigaray:

> Ironically, we might say that Irigaray herself can see the male genitals only according to phallomorphic parameters. But that is a question of the politics of the body. As for its poetics, we can perhaps recognize here that, if phallomorphic logic is not based in anatomy but, on the contrary, reconstructs anatomy in its image, then Irigaray's vulvomorphic logic is not predestined by anatomy but is already a symbolic interpretation of that anatomy. . . .
>
> Thus do I succeed in registering the multiplicity of the female genitals as a textual production, construing it in accord with our modern conception of writing.

In other words, pure blithering nonsense in which sex patter is desperately pressed into service in a vain effort to enliven conceptual nullity. Simone de Beauvoir, one is tempted to speculate, may have introduced Distinguished Professor Gallop to mental masturbation as well as the other kind.

The irony in all this is that Distinguished Professor Gallop is quite right about there being an erotic element to all real teaching. This indeed is something that has been recognized since Plato. But what has also been recognized since Plato is the special responsibility a teacher has for educating—and that means sublimating—his students' passions. One of the most profound contemporary meditations on the proper place of eros in education is that bête noir of politically correct academics, Allan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*. "Civilization," Bloom wrote, "or, to say the same thing, education is the taming or domestication of the soul's raw passions." How different things are for Distinguished Professor Gallop:

> Sexual harassment creates an environment that is hostile to a student's education. My experience was the opposite. I was in an environment extremely conducive to my education, a heady atmosphere where close personal contact intensified my desire to learn and my desire to excel. I learned and excelled; I desired and I fucked my teachers.

In the end, the appropriate response to Jane Gallop is pity. But what should we feel for her students? And what about the University of Wisconsin, which has seen fit to honor this poor creature with a distinguished professorship? Cynical and sophisticated academic hucksters like Stanley Fish delight in celebrating the rubbish that Jane Gallop and her peers put forward as scholarship. Like Nero, he stands back, amused, while the empire he should help protect dissolves into chaotic decadence.

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Edwin Muir's journey

by Robert Richman

In his *Autobiography* (1954), the Scottish poet Edwin Muir expressed bitterness at the late start he got on poetry. "I was thirty-five . . . and passing through a stage which, if things had been different, I should have reached ten years earlier. I began to write poetry at thirty-five instead of at twenty-five or twenty." In fact, his *First Poems* was published in 1925, when Muir was thirty-eight. It had been preceded by a ten-year spell of odd jobs, unsettled opinions (Nietzsche, socialism), and unhappy love affairs. He had already produced a volume of aphoristic essays, *We Moderns* (1918), which show Muir under the spell of Nietzsche and which he later disowned. In 1922, on a visit to Dresden with his wife, Muir had a kind of revelation: "I must live over again the years which I had lived wrongly . . . everyone should live his life twice, for the first attempt is always blind." The theme of repetition or return thus became increasingly important to Muir, who found in ancient myths a source of meaning that echoed and reechoed in contemporary life.

In his Introduction to Muir's *Selected Poems* (1966), T. S. Eliot stressed the thematic unity of Muir's *ouevre*. "I do not believe technique was ever a primary concern of Edwin's," wrote Eliot. "He was first and foremost deeply concerned with what he had to say." As Muir wrote in his *Autobiography*, "the life of every man is an endlessly repeated performance of the life of man"; our deeds on earth constitute "a myth which we act almost without knowing it." In *The Estate of Poetry* (1962), his last book of criticism, published posthumously, Muir expanded on this idea:

> Hugo von Hofmannsthal once said that true imagination is always conservative. By this he may have meant that it keeps intact the bond which unites us with the past of mankind, so that we can still understand Odysseus and Penelope, and the people of the Old Testament. Or he may have meant something more: that imagination is able to do this because it sees the life of everyone as the endless repetition of a single pattern. It is hard to explain how we enter into past lives if this is not done. We become human by repetition. . . . Every human being . . . will pass through the ancestral pattern, from birth to childhood and youth and manhood and age and death. He will feel hope and fear and love and hate and perhaps forgiveness.

Edwin Muir (1887–1959) began his own "ancestral pattern" on a farm in the Orkney Islands, a remote, northeastern section of Scotland. Orkney was originally inhabited by the Norse and the Scots, and the speech is a blend of the two languages. (In his *Autobiography*, Muir noted that while he came to write like an Englishman, his speech remained Orkney through and through.) At the time of Muir's birth, Orkney was still more or less untouched by the industrial revolution. The undesecrated landscape set

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the stage for an idyllic childhood, to which Muir would frequently refer in his poetry.

Orkney natives were ignorant of modernity and its discontents. "The farmers did not know ambition and the petty torments of ambition," Muir noted, nor did they "know what competition was, though they lived at the end of Queen Victoria's reign; they helped one another with their work when help was required, following the old usage; they had a culture made up of legend, folk-song, and the poetry and prose of the Bible." But goodheartedness was not the only marvel the young Muir witnessed growing up. There was also a rude economic self-sufficiency—in one passage, Muir describes the slaughtering of the hog, a ritual so much a part of life it lacks any "civilized" revulsion—and an easy commingling of the supernatural and the natural. In Orkney there "was no great distinction between the ordinary and the fabulous; the lives of living men were turned into legend."

An Autobiography contains some passages on childhood perceptions that very nearly equal those in Yeats's *Reveries over Childhood and Youth* and *The Trembling of the Veil*:

> I have often fancied, too, that in a child's mind there is at moments a divination of a hidden tragedy taking place around him, that tragedy being the life which he will not live for some years still, though it is there, invisible to him, already. And a child has also a picture of human existence peculiar to himself, which he probably never remembers after he has lost it: the original version of the world. I think of this picture or vision as that of a state which the earth, the houses on the earth, and the life of every human being are related to the sky overarching them; as if the sky fitted the earth and the earth the sky. Certain dreams convince me that a child has this vision, in which there is a completer harmony of all things with each other than he will ever know again.

The word "harmony" also appears in another passage from this part of *An Autobiography*, one concerning the burial of a young man who had returned to Orkney to die. After the funeral procession had disappeared round a bend, Muir stood for a long time "looking at the white, empty road, the hills and the sea, and what thoughts were in my mind then I shall never know; they were certainly tinged with sadness, but at the same time suffused with wonder and simple acceptance of the wonder."

This feeling of a sense of wonder, so powerful it operated even during an unhappy occasion like a funeral, was short-lived. In 1901, when Muir was fourteen, his father lost his farm, and the family had to move to Glasgow. The change forever marked Muir, for industrialized Glasgow was like nothing he had ever seen. The poor sanitation and the ramshackle houses filled the boy with gloom, as did the people: dauntless beggars who knocked on the doors of houses, slum dwellers on whose faces was etched what Muir described as "depraved and shameful knowledge."

Almost immediately upon his arrival in Glasgow, the young Muir endured a remarkable succession of tragedies. First, his father collapsed and died. A year later, his brother Willie perished from consumption. Then another brother, Johnnie, developed a brain tumor and died. A few months later, Muir's mother died. "The family now looked as if it had been swept by a gale," he wrote. "I was too young for so much death. All that time seemed to give no return, nothing but loss."

Muir started to read seriously while in Glasgow, but his daily jobs there were comically bad. He worked as a clerk in a number of offices; a chauffeur; a laborer in a beer-bottling plant; and then again as an office clerk in a bone factory. The last was an especially revolting experience. Bones from all over Scotland, some no longer fresh, were reduced to charcoal that was later used to purify sugar. "The bones, decorated with festoons of slowly writhing, fat yellow maggots" lay outside the building in a railway siding until the furnace was ready for them. The smell of the roasting bones, Muir wrote, "was a gentle, clinging, sweet stench,

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suggesting dissolution and hospitals and slaughter-houses, the odour of drains, and the rancid stink of bad, roasting meat." A room Muir rented around this time looked out on a graveyard; nothing could have been more apt. "Absorbed in my own dissociation," Muir observed of his Glasgow period, "the world retreated from me in all its shapes." It was in this foul atmosphere that he began to write the aphorisms that became *We Moderns*. "I, the poor clerk of a beer-bottling plant, adopted the creed of aristocracy," a self-mocking Muir later wrote in *An Autobiography*. In 1918, Muir met Willa Anderson. They married the following year, and, when he was thirty-two, Muir finally left Glasgow for London. It wasn't a moment too soon.

Among much else, London was home of *The New Age*, an important avant-garde journal that published Ezra Pound and other luminaries in the Teens and had published some of Muir's writing from Glasgow. When he arrived in London, Muir became friendly with the journal's editor, A. R. Orage. Though the two men soon drifted apart, Orage was responsible for one important incident in Muir's life: a friend of Orage's psychoanalyzed Muir free of charge. Though Muir began the analysis with trepidation, he later acknowledged that the experience did open him up to the world of dreams. After a long period of not dreaming at all, he now found that dreams "began to come in crowds," so much so that he began to keep a dream diary. "My unconscious mind, having unloaded itself" in the course of analysis "seemed to have become transparent"; hence "myths and legends entered [my conscious mind] without resistance and passed into my dreams and day dreams." After one dream the analyst interpreted as "the myth of creation," Muir wondered if it was he who was dreaming these dreams or the "racial unconscious."

Muir's *First Poems* is not as saturated with myth and legend as his later books. The only poems that deal explicitly with mythic themes are "Ballad of Hector in Hades" and "Ballad of the Flood," a poem about Noah. What the poems do reveal, however, is a writer very much at odds with the world. It may have been this sense of estrangement that made Muir (at least according to Willa, in her memoir of 1968, *Belonging*) come to dislike his *First Poems*. Only six poems from the book were included in Muir's *Collected Poems* in 1952, and only three in the *Selected Poems* of 1966.

First Poems nevertheless contains some fine work. Escape is inevitably the theme in several of these poems. In "The Lost Land," the "haven" the poet seeks is "past huge mountains and across great seas." In "Childhood" and "Remembrance," he turns to the past for solace. He does this in "Horses," too, but the spell is broken the moment his memory of the past vanishes:

> Ah, now it fades! it fades! and I must pine
> Again for that dread country crystalline,
> Where the blank field and the still-standing tree
> Were bright and fearful presences to me.

In the poems set in the real world, gloom dominates. In "Reverie," an ill-at-ease poet mocks the "thoughtless paradise" of a passing soldier and his girl; next to them he feels a "thin-toned anguish." And in "October at Hellbrunn," a gray sky "broods" on a garden, "fountains . . . play oppressed," a "shadowless weight lies on the wooded hill," and "sad leaves fall heedless with no sound."

Between 1921 and 1924, the Muirs traveled around Europe, visiting Prague and parts of Germany. In 1925, they began collaborating on a translation of Kafka's *Der Prozess* ("The Trial"), which had been published that year. Kakfa, who had died in 1924, proved to be aesthetically congenial to Muir. For both Kafka and Muir—the Muir of *First Poems*, at least—the commonplace processes of daily life were highly problematic. Kafka didn't turn to his childhood for solace as Muir did; but Kafka's "now" is a place where human effort is pointless.

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When Muir met and married Willa and left Glasgow, he was strong enough to spurn Nietzsche, but it would be a while before he could rid himself of the discomfort with the world that Glasgow had imparted.

Transition, the collection of literary essays Muir published in 1926, sheds a good deal of light on his aesthetic development in this crucial period. Each of the writers which Muir examines—Eliot, James Joyce, Aldous Huxley, D. H. Lawrence, Virginia Woolf, and others of that generation—is (like Muir) marked by disillusionment. He describes Eliot, whose *Waste Land* had appeared four years earlier, as "bitter, melancholy, despairing." As a critic, however, Muir did not feel that all of these writers had succeeded in turning their feelings of alienation into fully realized works of literary art. If *Ulysses* did succeed in that endeavor, according to Muir, it was because Joyce was so entrenched in the reality he ultimately condemned. "In hardly any other work of modern times," Muir wrote, "is there such an overpowering sense of the inexhaustibility of human life." Joyce's novel, in Muir's view, "depends very little for its comprehension on the mood which its readers take to it." With the novels of Huxley, on the other hand, you must make "the assumptions he makes." When the fashion for disillusion faded, Muir believed, Huxley would be forgotten and Joyce remembered, even though they may have seemed to share the same spirit of disillusionment at the time.

As for D. H. Lawrence, he and other advocates of what Muir called "the literature of escape" are said to grasp the cultural, social, and aesthetic predicament of the age "in its full and appalling form," but the escape they offer is judged to be "too sweeping." Where *Ulysses* succeeds because "the values of life and art, of reality and imagination, are developed side by side," Lawrence's works are found to offer an imagination insufficiently tethered to the common realities of life.

In his next book, a critical work titled *The Structure of the Novel* (1928), Muir was similarly concerned with the issue of striking a balance between art and life. *Wuthering Heights* succeeds, Muir writes, "because the balance between necessity and freedom is held more tautly." *Necessity* and *freedom* are the terms Muir now substitutes for *reality* and *imagination*. In Muir's view, the imagination is often susceptible to two failures—not making a sufficient effort to render reality plausible, and not finding more in the past than a means of escape.

When something like this aesthetic equilibrium is achieved in Muir's own poems, the element of imagination is called upon to give meaning to everyday life by forging a synthesis of the mythical and the real. As Muir wrote in *An Autobiography*:

> Time wakens a longing more poignant than all the longings caused by the division of lovers in space, for there is no road back into its country. Our bodies were not made for that journey; only the imagination can venture upon it; and the setting out, the road, and the arrival: all is imagination.

The actual events of one's life are transformed into "fable": "There are times in every man's life when he seems to become for a little while a part of the fable, and to be recapitulating some legendary drama . . . the Fall is one of those events, and the purifications which happen in one's life belong to them, too." And further:

> a poem on Achilles pursuing Hector round the walls of Troy was really a resuscitation of the afternoon when I ran away, in real terror, from another boy as I returned from school. The bare landscape of that little island became . . . a universal landscape over which Abraham and Moses and Achilles and Ulysses and Tristram and all sorts of pilgrims passed; and Troy was associated with the Castle, a mere green mound, near my father's house.

In *Variations on a Time Theme*, a sequence Muir published in 1934, no mythical imagery is employed. But, as the title indicates,

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the whole sequence expresses a mythical sense of time:

> At the dead centre of the boundless plain
> *Does our way end? Our horses pace and pace*
> Like steeds forever labouring on a shield,
> Keeping their solitary heraldic courses.

The "labouring" steeds exist from epoch to epoch; they triumph over time by following their established course. The mind, too, triumphs over time by following such "solitary heraldic courses." It is the failure to find our place in the cosmos that puts us at time's mercy. As Muir notes elsewhere in *Variations on a Time Theme*:

> . . . the places
> Our hearts have hid in will be viewed by strangers
> Sitting where we are, breathing the foreign air
> Of the new realm they have inherited.
> But we shall fall here on the plain.
>
> *
>
> . . . We sit where others sat before us
> And others will sit after us.

Two of the poems in the first section of *Journeys and Places* (1937) are linked to specific figures: "Tristram's Journey" and "Hölderlin's Journey." The second section consists of poems about unspecified places: "The Unfamiliar Place," "The Solitary Place," "The Place of Light and Darkness." In all of the poems in the sequence, Muir is obsessed with the same themes—"A world behind, a world before," as he writes in "The Town Betrayed." Or, as he writes in "The Road": "And in a million Edens fall/ A million Adams drowned in darkness."

The poetry is now crowded with ancient figures of history and myth. "The Stationary Journey" is a pageant featuring David, Homer, Hannibal, Caesar, Christ, Adam and Eve, Jesus, St. Augustine, and Charlemagne. (Muir conjures up an image of the latter's infant hand lying "against his mother's breast.") The journey is "stationary" because it occurs in the mind. Two-thirds into the poem, Muir pays tribute to the mental faculty that permits such flights into past time:

> To the mind's eternity I turn,
> With leaf, fruit, blossom on the spray,
> See the dead world grow green within
> Imagination's one long day.

Scott and Scotland, published a year before *Journeys and Places*, was written when the Muirs had returned to Scotland and were not terribly happy about it. (*Scottish Journey*, a not-unadmiring account of the people and places of the land, was also the product of this period.) For despite Muir's new means of reconciling himself to the time in which he lived by linking it to a mythic past, he still couldn't easily reclaim the land he had left. He was too much the wanderer for that.

Scott and Scotland contains some bracing criticism of his native land, and of its most famous writer. It was Muir's view that Scotland had neither the community nor the tradition to nourish its writers. Its verse has "become a mixture of Nationalist ideology, local patriotism, and vague international sentiment." The only choice for the serious writer, he believed, was to absorb the English tradition and write in English. (This drew the ire of Hugh MacDiarmid, the Communist and nationalist poet who wrote in Lallans.) As for Sir Walter Scott, Muir was similarly lacking in piety: "There is a very curious emptiness behind the wealth of his imagination."

An early version of Muir's *Autobiography*, entitled *The Story and the Fable*, appeared in 1940. In 1942, he was given a wartime job on the Edinburgh office of the British Council. There he would stay until the British Council sent him to Prague in 1946. In *The Narrow Place* (1943), his next book of poems, war is very much on the poet's mind. But in every poem on the subject, Muir abandons all historical specificity. In "The Little General," the unnamed General

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appears to be Hitler; he arrives across "the sound, bringing the island death," hoping "to cow a never-conquered land." But Muir withholds the identity of the beleaguered island. Similarly, in "The Guess," an "Ark full" of "women, men, and cattle" are "engrossed by war," but which war is left for the reader to determine. Even when directly spurred on by current calamities, as Muir seems to have been here, the poems shun historical explicitness.

Several poems in *The Narrow Place* deal with the familiar Muir themes. "The Return of Odysseus"—the hero of which is perhaps Muir's own archetype—follows the "long/ And winding road of the world." But many do not. "The Confirmation," a love poem for Willa, starts out relying on some familiar images—"twisting roads," a "traveller," "a place"—but abandons them, wittily, to try various alternates that might especially suit his wife:

> Yes, yours, my love, is the right human face.
> I in my mind had waited for this long,
> Seeing the false and searching for the true,
> Then found you as a traveller finds a place
> Of welcome suddenly amid the wrong
> Valleys and rocks and twisting roads
> What shall I call you? A fountain in a waste,
> A well of water in a country dry,
> Or anything that's honest and good, an eye
> That makes the whole world bright. Your open heart,
> Simple and giving, gives the primal deed,
> The first good world, the blossom, the blowing seed,
> The hearth, the steadfast land, the wandering sea,
> Not beautiful or rare in every part,
> But like yourself, as they were meant to be.

The "dissociation" caused by the Glasgow years is now only a memory.

In *The Voyage* (1946), Muir focuses again on wars past and present. Here, though, the subject of war tends to be filtered through a prism of private imagery. In "The Return"—a different poem from the one in *The Narrow Place*—the Greek soldiers traveling home from the Trojan War are Muir's ostensible subject. And in "The Escape," a poem narrated by the escaped prisoner, Muir casts the protagonist's flight in terms of—what else?—a voyage:

> Escaping from the enemy's hand
> Into the enemy's vast domain,
> I sought by many a devious path,
> Having got in, to get out again.
>
> The endless trap lay everywhere,
> And all the roads ran in a maze,
> Hither and thither, like a web
> To catch the careless days.

The Labyrinth (1949), similarly projects a troubling world of snares and traps. But where the snares and traps in "The Escape" exist in and out of jail, the perils of "The Labyrinth" have just been overcome by the grateful speaker. And yet, although there is no current threat, memories of the labyrinth still disturb: "There have been times when I have heard my footsteps/ Still echoing in the maze." Here the forces of good and evil are clearly drawn. At one point in the poem, a "bad spirit" appears and says:

> "No, do not hurry.
> No need to hurry. Haste and delay are equal
> In this one world, for there's no exit, none,
> No place to come to, and you'll end where you are,
> Deep in the centre of an endless maze."

"Deep in the centre of an endless maze"—it certainly sounds like the fate of Kafka's heroes. But for them, of course—unlike Muir's situation—there was no choice. For the speaker in Muir's poem, there is, as he writes further into the poem:

> . . . But the lie,
> The maze, the wild-wood waste of falsehood, roads
> That run and run and never reach an end,
> Embowered in error—I'd be prisoned there
> But that my soul has birdwings to fly free.

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Oh these deceits are strong almost as life.
Last night I dreamt I was in the labyrinth,
And woke far on. I did not know the place.

In 1949, Muir was sent to Rome, again under the auspices of the British Council. What interested him in the Italian capital was, inevitably, the way "the ages" seemed to be "assembled" there "in a tumultuous order." At street corners, as he said, one could almost look "across from one century to another." But even more interesting for Muir was the way religion permeated every aspect of the Romans' lives. The images of Christ and the Incarnation that were everywhere—images that he would once have found offensive—now "seemed to me natural and right." It was a long way from the sober and austere Presbyterian church that Muir had attended as a boy. There, faith and belief were cut off "from all the week-day world." In his boyhood church, "nothing told me that Christ was born in the flesh and had lived on the earth."

Muir's dormant faith had actually been renewed ten years earlier. In 1939, just before the outbreak of war, Muir observed some schoolboys playing marbles on the pavement. To most this would be a trivial event. But to Muir it was "a simple little rehearsal for a resurrection, promising a timeless renewal of life." That night Muir began reciting the Lord's Prayer in a loud, emphatic voice. He was convinced he was a Christian, "no matter how bad a one." Yet he did not turn to any church.

After the trip to Rome, Muir was wary of other religions, especially those of the pagan past. "Although the pagan gods had visited the earth and conversed with men, they did not assume the burden of our flesh, live our life and die our death, but after their interventions withdrew into their impenetrable privacy."

Muir's last collection of poetry, *One Foot in Eden* (1956), is far and away his most religious. Though there are poems about "old" figures like Telemachus, Prometheus, and Orpheus, Biblical themes and figures predominate. "The Days" recounts the seven days of creation, while "The Incarnate One" examines the "abstract calamity" of the "fleshless word":

The fleshless word, growing, will bring us
down,
Pagan and Christian man alike will fall,
The auguries say, the white and black and
brown,
The merry and sad, theorist, lover, all,
Invisibly will fall;
Abstract calamity, save for those who can
Build their cold empire on the abstract
man.

In "The Christmas" Muir writes:

A Child, a God, he will respire
Obediently time's mortal breath,
Freely work out his double hire,
Endlessly enact a Birth, a Death,
Accomplishing the miracle,
The marriage feast of heaven and earth,
Of which one earth we cannot tell
Save in such words: a Death, a Birth.

The concepts of good and evil resonate throughout the volume. In the book's title poem, Muir writes: "Evil and good stand thick around/ In the fields of charity and sin/ Where we shall lead our harvest in." Destinations now haunt the poet as much as journeys. In Muir's important poem "The Horses," guilt and innocence, good and evil, are also in the plainest view. But the poem is not sabotaged artistically because of it, as so many such poems are. "The Horses" is about the unexpected return, after an apocalypse, of new horses that restore the "longlost archaic companionship" with the surviving humans. The narrator condemns the "old bad world" that wreaked the damage:

Barely a twelvemonth after
The seven days war that put the world to
sleep,
Late in the evening the strange horses came.
By then we had made our convenant with
silence,

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But in the first few days it was so still
We listened to our breathing and were afraid.
On the second day
The radios failed; we turned the knobs; no answer.
But on the third day a warship passed us, heading north,
Dead bodies piled on the deck. On the sixth day
A plane plunged over us into the sea. Thereafter
Nothing. The radios dumb.
And still they stand in corners of our kitchens,
And stand, perhaps, turned on, in a million rooms,
All over the world. But now if they should speak,
If on a sudden they should speak again
If on the stroke of noon a voice should speak,
We would not listen, we would not let it bring
That old bad world that swallowed its children quick
At one great gulp. We would not have it again . . .

Have Armageddon and its aftermath ever been more powerfully, more palpably imagined? And yet, I do not think that the poem's extraordinary vividness is the greatest strength of "The Horses." Its special power is in the way cataclysm evokes Muir's most abiding theme: the renewal of that "long-lost archaic" bond between life and the world even in the face of catastrophe ("Our life is changed; their coming our beginning"). "The Horses" is not a topical antiwar poem, as some have seen it to be, but a perfect consummation of Muir's faith in the poetic vocation. Anyone who thinks Muir's imagination deminished after his visit to Rome hasn't read "The Horses." The question Muir formulated long ago—do we have to share the writer's point of view to like his book?—could be asked here. The answer, though, is clear: one doesn't have to share Muir's religious faith to appreciate this poem.

The Estate of Poetry appeared in the United States in 1962, three years after his death. (In Muir's last years, he was warden of Newbattle Abbey, a college for working-class men in Scotland.) In this book, which was based on the Charles Eliot Norton lectures at Harvard in 1955–56, Muir makes a case for the widening of poetry's audience. There was a certain historical irony in this, for the confessional movement in American poetry—a democratizing and, alas, vulgarizing influence—would shortly widen the audience for poetry in a way Muir hadn't intended. Muir did not believe popularity should be achieved through personal revelation. On the contrary, it was Muir's conviction that poetry would regain popularity by a return to the great themes that had once occupied it. Unfortunately, in a day marked by the loss of any sense of a communal cultural past, the kind of poetry Muir envisioned has proved to be scarcely imaginable.

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Poems
by William Virgil Davis & John Clarke

A visit to Manafon

for R. S. Thomas

Still patches of snow on the high hills
above this frost valley where new lambs
run from watching ewes in air so cold
with chill your breath like glassy mirrors
breaks off in front of you and you walk
through your own reflection—think back
through time to more than forty years ago.

*

The small chapel, built from stone quarried
from the nearby river, has stood for centuries.
The western wall, thick with vine-veined
stone, is a map of the rooted land itself.
In the tiny room at the back of the nave
two small windows—barred since recent
break-ins—hold fifteenth century angels

in pale green and yellow glass. The warden,
from her lambing fields, aproned in mud,
has come to let us in. She watches nonchalantly
as we roam around. There isn't much to see.
"We sometimes have a dozen for services." She
identifies herself as she would be remembered,
"The little girl in the blue dress," and gives

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her maiden name to those, like us, who ask
about the past. The great man, when he was here,
we wondered, did she remember him? "Oh,
yes, of course. How could I ever forget? It's all,
now, that brings folks like you. Nothing else.
Yes, he was here for twelve years. He sometimes
came out to the fields when we were bringing

in the hay." "To help?" "Yes," she laughed,
"to help. But he was such a big, strong man.
He threw the hay all the way over the wagon.
Mostly, though, he came at night, to sit and talk
before our kitchen fires. He had a gentle voice,
always spoke softly. But the eyes. That's what
you'd remember, the eyes, like fire reflected;

burning, always burning." We take a quick last
look, sign the book, thank her for opening, then
wander out into the walled grounds, the small
cemetery surrounding the church, through patches
of snowdrops, down the short curve of road, past
the ash tree that unleaved suddenly like a fountain,
to the rectory (now in private hands) beside the river.

*

All is still. Everything is damp. The trees drip.
The hills surround this spot, this hushed hollow.
We have no time to climb above the village,
see from where he saw the rolling hills of Wales
stretch westward toward the sea. It is as if the
silence itself has spoken. Below, the people he
came here to serve; above, his distanced God.

—*William Virgil Davis*

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A truce

As suddenly as such a war,
steam signals over our coffee cups—
set on white cloth in tremors of shade—
become propitious: sentries begin
to joke in my village, laugh in yours.
Ambassadors toss old writs to the wind.
Peasants bear laundry down to the river.
Trade routes reopen, crowded with wagons.

—*John Clarke*

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June night

The tail of the Scorpion
a light-static

over the road,
an old barn water-logged.

Then wind, northwest,
the clouds baled to the east,

and now the whole
covenant of stars:

the Dolphin's jack;
the Dragon we traced at school;

the Lady in Chains,
who suffered, who was fair;

and stunned at last
the scythes of Herculean limbs.

And here the shut
petals of chaste houses,

the last fall of rain
left to the pines.

—John Clarke

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Art

Willem de Kooning's late paintings

by Mario Naves

"Jasper Johns," I once heard an art dealer declare, "is the Rembrandt of our time." It speaks to the pressures of the marketplace and the hyperbole it can generate that such an opinion is shared by not a few members of the art world. Yet if Johns, that dour dauber of flags and targets, has been accorded the status of an old master, what are we to make of Willem de Kooning? De Kooning is, after all, one of the pioneers of Abstract Expressionism, the artist for whom the label "action painting" was all but tailor-made. He has long been a figure of mythic dimensions, as are many of the artists associated with the New York School, and it's easy to ascertain why. As the contemporary art scene is characterized more and more by triviality, the era of Abstract Expressionism acquires an almost magical ambiance. Whatever its merits as art—and with hindsight, they are less monolithic than was once supposed—Abstract Expressionism was the last identifiable movement defined by a seriousness of pursuit, and one of its key figures was Willem de Kooning.

De Kooning, more so than Gorky or Pollock, is a towering figure in American art, and the adulation extended toward him has often reached hysterical levels. Tales of de Kooning imitators during the halcyon days of the New York School are both legion and true; some artists even went so far as to affect de Kooning's Dutch accent. It would not be preposterous to state that, for some at least, he approaches the status of deity. If this sounds goofy, consider Peter Schjeldahl's article on de Kooning's late paintings, currently the focus of an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, in the January 1997 issue of *Artforum*. Schjeldahl informs us that "what's there may approach perfection as closely as human performance can." Anyone familiar with Schjeldahl's writing—one hesitates in calling it criticism—will recognize this as a typical Schjeldahlism: giddy, memorable, and picayune. Schjeldahl is, however, a handy gauge as to what is fashionable in the art world. So when he, along with Robert Storr in his catalogue essay for "Willem de Kooning: The Late Paintings, The 1980s,"[1] compares the artist's paintings to those of Rembrandt and Mondrian, one has a pretty good hunch of what the status quo in the art world is.

1 "Willem de Kooning: The Late Paintings, The 1980s" opened at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, on January 26, 1997, and remains on view through April 29. The exhibition was organized by the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art (October 3, 1995–January 7, 1996) and the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis (February 3–May 8, 1996). The show was later seen at the Städtisches Kunstmuseum, Bonn (June 14–August 11, 1996) and the Museum Boymans-Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (September 9–November 25, 1996). A catalogue of the exhibition, with essays by Gary Garrels and Robert Storr, has been published by the San Francisco Museum of Art and the Walker Art Center (144 pages, $50; $29.95 paper).

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Such comparisons are piffle, of course; to paraphrase Freud, sometimes a Dutchman is only a Dutchman. The only Dutch master whose work bears scrutiny as a measure of de Kooning's art is de Kooning himself. And this is where myth has its basis in fact. For, at his best, he was a painter of brilliance. His work of the 1940s, in particular the black and white paintings, are those of an artist reformulating tradition—in this case, Cubist tradition—while honoring it. The strict, not to say limiting, structure of Cubism gave de Kooning's indomitable line and precarious paint-handling a classical armature without which they would have collapsed. Like his hero, Picasso, de Kooning was a draftsman of immense subtlety, and it is no coincidence that both achieved their greatest work with a minimum of color. What dominates de Kooning's paintings of this time is his line: an electric yet lithe force that swerves, swoops, dodges, and shimmies at breakneck speed. It is also one whose definition of mass, contour, shape, and space is unerring. Clement Greenberg wrote that de Kooning's abstractions were "haunted" by the "disembodied contours of Michelangelo's and Rubens's nude figure compositions." The human form has been a constant, if sometimes clouded, motif throughout de Kooning's *oeuvre*. This physicality is manifested in the tense bump-and-grind of *Attic* (1949). Standing in front of it, one is pleasurably boggled by de Kooning's mastery.

Paintings like *Attic* and *Excavation* (1950) are classics of American art and the apogee of de Kooning's career. He created many paintings in the forty years since then, but never matched the artistry of the black and white works. Given their ferocity, it's hard to see how he could have pulled off such contradictory and thrilling paintings for too long. And, of course, he didn't. Which isn't to say that his subsequent paintings—forget his lumpish, ill-conceived sculpture—lacked artistic acumen. The bravado found in passages of the infamous "Woman" paintings, for instance, has swayed even some feminists. But passages, as opposed to unified works of art, is what they remain. And even de Kooning's defenders have a tough time stomaching his later woman-as-landscape paintings, wherein the artist seemingly forsook oils for pudding. While de Kooning's imitators became an art-world joke, that the artist himself became his own worst imitator is no joke at all.

The decline of de Kooning's talent is as frustrating as the decline of his mental health is lamentable. Beginning in the 1980s, de Kooning suffered pronounced memory loss, an affliction apparent in the 1970s and attributed both to Alzheimer's disease and senility. He stopped painting in 1990 and is now in the full-time care of medical personnel. What has been a matter of contention is the effect de Kooning's health had on his art and the extent to which he had an active hand in creating it. Schjeldahl pooh-poohs the rumors that the late paintings were done by studio assistants, but acknowledges that "they took an increasing hand in helping him start each work . . . [and] decided that a painting was done when de Kooning ceased work on it for a time judged long enough." For an artist obsessed with the difficulties of finishing a painting, this process must have been liberating—or demeaning. Is it callous to wonder if, at the time, de Kooning knew the difference?

It's difficult not to think of de Kooning's fading health as one traces the chronology of "The Late Paintings." Such a tactic seems more appropriate for those who attend to the pathologies of daytime television than to art criticism. So why does the exhibition become so much less as it progresses? Having seen a few late paintings scattered in museum and gallery exhibitions, I wasn't prepared for much of substance here. Yet I found myself taken by how respectable some of them are, particularly those paintings from the early Eighties. True, *Untitled XII* (1982) and *Untitled II* (1983) don't have the wallop of, say, *Valentine* (1947), a staple of MOMA's permanent collection and a minor effort. But they do get by. The game of peek-a-boo played in *Untitled II*, between

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the red and blue underpainting and the white overlays, creates the requisite tension, and the candylike ribbons of color in *Untitled III* (1982) have body to them. In fact, all of the works here exhibit some flair. But that doesn't mean they can withstand analogies to Matisse, Titian, or Cézanne. Make no mistake about it: were these paintings not by Willem de Kooning they would be dismissed, by the same people now showering them with kudos, as third-rate Ab-Ex derivations.

With the exception of the above works and a few others, the paintings in the first couple of galleries only occasionally rise above self-parody—rarely have brushstrokes struggled so mightily for motivation. Yet with their blurred surfaces and looping gestures, they are identifiably de Koonings. As one follows the course of the exhibition, the paintings become increasingly dry, cartoonish, and less fraught with (as Greenberg had it) *terribilità*. They become, in essence, de Kooning-esque. The return of a Cubist armature is curious and noteworthy, yet the resulting linear network never snaps the paintings into place. Their biomorphism hints at a rhythmic cadence, but doesn't build to anything coherent. Instead, the paintings maunder. The artist's famed line loops, turns back on itself, and squiggles just like we expect it to. But it has no place to go and no reason for being; it is less a pictorial force than a slack notational rendering. The word I have heard bandied about in describing these paintings is "lyrical." Yet I suspect that this is an expedient way of avoiding the fact that the paintings are not very good.

In some cases, as in the scraped down *Untitled XV* (1983), the paintings can hardly be said to be there at all. The one feature that characterizes de Kooning's late work is the overlays of white paint, a device used to cut into forms or as a means of erasing. Here white obliterates not only previous states of the painting, but any oomph they may have had as color. Admittedly, color has always been of secondary importance to de Kooning, and here it becomes bleached and chalky, especially his reds and pinks. Despite the recurrent use of blue, red, and yellow—the supposed Mondrian influence—de Kooning's color sense is anemic and faceless. While the paintings are mildly pleasant in a diminished way, the best they can aspire to is a kind of furniture showroom decoration. (Do I recall correctly that a late de Kooning is the first painting by a living artist to be hung in the White House?) But even as decoration, they are flaccid—Morris Louis is musclebound in comparison. By the time one reaches a painting with no title from 1987, with its inert oranges, purples, and creams, it is clear that de Kooning has become oblivious to the nuances of color and the rigors of painting.

"The Late Paintings" is a major exhibition. It is intended to be the apotheosis of one painter's life and of Abstract Expressionism. Rarely have works of art been accorded as luxuriant an amount of space as they have been here, and one can almost hear the myth-making machine chugging away. "One would not have predicted for Willem de Kooning a great old age," writes Storr and "The Late Paintings" is meant, in part, to be a celebration of artistic fruition commensurate with the wisdom of age. It is, in actuality, something very different. If Storr really wanted to recognize an "old" master, he should curate an exhibition of paintings by George McNeil, an artist who realized himself late in life and made something grand, energetic, and funny from the verities of the New York School. McNeil doesn't have half of de Kooning's cachet, and such an exhibition would require more bravery (and independence) than most curators can muster. What we have instead is a painful reminder of how the frailties of mortals can outweigh the claims of myth. "Willem de Kooning: The Late Paintings" is an affront to the masterpieces that constitute de Kooning's true legacy and an unsavory artifact of the art world's own bad faith.

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Photography

The way Olmsted saw

by Francis Morrone

That admirable institution, the Canadian Centre for Architecture, under the strong-willed leadership of Phyllis Lambert, has taken up the task of recording the fate of several of Frederick Law Olmsted's landscape creations in North America.[1] The CCA hired three of our leading landscape photographers—Robert Burley, Lee Friedlander, and Geoffrey James—to assess the status of Olmsted's works. What has emerged are an exhibition and a book that tell us a great deal more about the photographers' concerns than about Olmsted's.

The handsomely printed catalogue to the exhibition provides us with plenty of information about the photographers, their works, and their approaches. The book includes a superb, if too-brief, essay by John Szarkowski on "The Photographer in the Garden." Szarkowski is scarcely capable of writing an essay that is not fecund and felicitous. Other essays are by Ms. Lambert and by Paolo Costantini, Curator of the Photographs Collection of the CCA. There are, in addition, interviews, conducted by David Harris of the CCA, with each of the three photographers. The exhibition, which originated at the CCA in Montreal, appeared in a slightly abridged version in the galleries of the Equitable Center in Manhattan.

Mr. Szarkowski's expert ministrations notwithstanding, I have never quite been able to think of Lee Friedlander as a major artist. Were he a painter, we would describe his techniques with such terms as "big brush" and "heavy loading." Rembrandt could match such techniques to a deep underlying solidity of form, and used a light touch in appropriate places in his greatest paintings. At his best, Friedlander attempts to attain to this lofty standard. But his best—which is clearly his images of Olmsted's grounds for the North Carolina house that Richard Morris Hunt designed for George Washington Vanderbilt—is rare. Typically, Friedlander's works, rendered through a Hasselblad superwide view camera, remind one of some of the wilder excrescences of High Victorian architecture. Another obvious correlative is the painting of Francis Bacon: just as Bacon sees not human beings but carcasses, so Friedlander has an uncanny ability to make vegetation look like dead meat.

Geoffrey James, by contrast, is pure Corot. This photographer, famed for his won-

1 "Viewing Olmsted: Photographs by Robert Burley, Lee Friedlander, and Geoffrey James" opened at the Equitable Gallery, New York, on February 12, 1997, and closed on March 15. The exhibition was first seen at the Canadian Centre for Achitecture, Montreal (October 16, 1996–February 2, 1997) and will travel to the Wexner Center for Arts, Columbus (May 9–August 10, 1997) and the Davis Museum Center, Wellesley, Massachusetts (September 2–November 23, 1997). A catalogue of the exhibition, edited by Phyllis Lambert, has been published by *the Canadian Centre for Architecture* and distributed by the MIT Press (119 pages, $25).

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derful images of Italian Renaissance gardens, brings a more delicate sensibility to the project than does Friedlander. Szarkowski pithily describes James's images as an elegiac vision of ancient farms. This is nicely put—and it could stand as well for the Barbizon sensibility in painting. James's wide-angle gelatin silver prints (shot with a thirty-five-millimeter camera) are classically composed, fine grained, and deeply moving: they are the fruits of the quest for the visible remnants of the lost Olmstedian ideal. They are without question the high point of the show.

Robert Burley's large-format color photographs are a bit too "New Coloristic" for my taste, with their sometimes lurid hues. Still, I quite like Burley's single photograph (in the catalogue) of Mount Royal Park: the stark color contrast between the upper and lower halves of the image expresses something essential about that very interesting park's role as sentinel and spine of Montreal. I also like the damp autumnal sense he imparts to his image (not in the catalogue) of Chicago's Midway Plaisance.

The work of each photographer is a commentary on Olmsted's landscapes, a way of interpreting their canons of taste and sensibility. It is well in this context to recall that Olmsted was not the sole designer—perhaps not even the principal designer—of some of his most celebrated works. His partner was Calvert Vaux, who in the 1870s was the leading exponent in America of that decade's bowdlerized Ruskinianism. Vaux was a man of overflowing gifts, and of a volatile, self-defeating temperament. He was also, as Olmsted was not, an aesthetic ideologue. If Olmsted's and Vaux's notions for landscaping grew out of the English landscape tradition of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, then Vaux's structures in his and Olmsted's parks are a pure High Victorian gallimaufry—and not the less delightful for that. I think Friedlander has been betrayed by this Vauxian legacy into projecting upon Olmsted—and upon the team of Olmsted and Vaux--an element of that late nineteenth-century genteel-tradition-at-bay sensibility which has, I believe, been misread by academic critics in this century. Paolo Costantini, in his essay in the catalogue, furthers this egregious misunderstanding by conflating Olmsted's intentions with those of Frank Lloyd Wright, when, in fact, the motivations of the two men were often diametrically opposed.

Geoffrey James, by contrast, sees the Barbizon in Olmsted's parks. This is much nearer the point. He sees that Olmsted's parks are carefully built up out of thousands of daubs of the small brush. Friedlander's photographs, and presumably the vision he wishes to convey of Olmsted, are, as Szarkowski states, images of the jungle dreaming of civilization. Friedlander seeks to express the delusory vision of the gardener, the vision, as Szarkowski suggests, of the planned landscape as an inherent impossibility. We see this in Friedlander's images of Chicago's Jackson Park, grounds originally laid out by Olmsted for the "White City" of the Chicago world's fair of 1893. Dense screens of unkempt foliage foil our ability to view the classical splendor of Graham, Anderson, Probst & White's magnificent Palace of Fine Arts, the only of the fair's buildings to survive to our day. At Biltmore—the aforementioned house and grounds in North Carolina—Friedlander gives in to the tranquil beauty. This is also the case, to some extent, with his images of Riverside, outside of Chicago. In Prospect Park, Brooklyn, alas, he is utterly defeated: the focus upon the forms of underbrush is rather like a reproduction of a Rubens focusing upon details of worn pigment. "Viewing Olmsted" is an exhibition of works of art representing works of art—a tricky business. And Prospect Park, I dare say, is one of the supreme artistic triumphs of the nineteenth century. It's hard to say whether Friedlander knows that.

James, on the other hand, seeks the integrity, and finds the dignity—the elegiac vision of the ancient farm. It is enthralling, yes, but also a sad reminder, juxtaposed

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with the other photographers' works, that there is a great chasm separating the way we see from the way Olmsted saw. On the happy side, we can thank James for reminding us that it is not an unbridgeable chasm. Intent study of Olmsted's parks—or of Barbizon paintings, or of Ruskin's prose—might still begin to recapture the spirit of seeing, not, I think, as an end in itself, but as an end among and closely related to other ends. It is a sort of undergirding morality of seeing which has been willfully ravaged in our time. And much as I hate to say it, avid amateur lensman and collector of photographs that I am, we must lay at least part—perhaps a large part—of the blame for this state of affairs at the feet of the photographic muse. For it is photography which has created the inflation of images that is at least as profound a hallmark of our age as the inflation of currencies. Geoffrey James also reminds us that it is perhaps still a tad early to accuse all photographers of being accomplices in this debasement of the visual. Under such conditions of visual inflation, how may we view Olmsted's parks, other than to see them—as Herbert Muschamp, architecture critic for *The New York Times*, sees them—as receptacles for "amenities" of dubious value, or as multicultural playgrounds, valued by and for roller skaters, bearers of loud radios, barbecue grillers, corporate softball players, exhibitionists of many kinds, "wilding" teenage gangs, audiences for environmentally disastrous rock concerts, and any number of others who, not to put too fine a point on it, would have made Frederick Law Olmsted sick?

My principal difficulty with this exhibition and this book, however, is that the historical note—promised by the CCA's stated intentions—is left unsounded, as though it were thought it might be provided by the images alone. Art and history, alas, are distinct and often incompatible modes of knowledge. Images, used as historical evidence, require verbal contexts, and that is what is missing. When, at the turn of the present century,

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New York's greatest historian, Isaac Newton Phelps Stokes, published several volumes of historical prints tracing the topographical development of Manhattan Island, he understood that this visual evidence could easily torpedo his intentions if he did not place it in a study of the joint evolution of urban topography and urban printmaking.

Similarly, Stokes's less ambitious (though still masterly) successor, John A. Kouwenhoven, understood the same thing as recently as the 1950s, when he composed his *Columbia Historical Portrait of New York*. Francis Haskell, in his *History and Its Images* (1993, Yale University Press), addresses the profoundly problematic nature of the uses of visual evidence for the documenting of history. These issues seem to have eluded the curators of "Viewing Olmsted." Make no mistake: these photographs are intended as historical evidence. We are, then, enjoined by the curators to take our history in a purely visual form. This is distressing, because it is impossible.

In the book, the photographs lack meaningful captions, as though they might impinge upon the artistic integrity of the images. The name of the park and the year of the photograph are all that is offered. The city or other location of the park is not stated in the captions. Instead, such information is relegated to a scanty appendix listing the parks visited by the photographers, proffering a modicum of useful information such as where the parks are located and the years they were created. This veiling of the verbal lends a ghostly abstractness to the enterprise, in which the parks are displayed as pure objects outside of time and physical context. A Friedlander shot of Prospect Park's underbrush may or may not in itself be a work of art of some substance. It may or may not, in itself, be a testimony to the aesthetic vision of Frederick Law Olmsted—a kind of work of art criticism. What it cannot be, in itself, is historical evidence. There is no history but where there are words.

I am, when it comes to exhibitions of works of art, generally all in favor of a strict minimum of posted information about the works. My ideal is that employed by Dr. Alfred Barnes at the Barnes Foundation: name of artist and year of work—anything more gets in the way of seeing. But in "Viewing Olmsted," works of art are asked to do double duty by serving as historical evidence. One or the other side of this equation is going to suffer. And given the avowed purposes of the CCA, I believe they erred by falling so heavily on the minimalist side.

One way the CCA might have remedied this would have been to include far more verbal material. Of what verbal material there is, the only bit of it that even makes any sense, let alone contributes to our understanding of the photographs, is Mr. Szarkowski's little essay—and it is, alas, little. Ms. Lambert's introduction is, in spite of its brevity, plodding, and is filled, bizarrely, with quotes from Merleau-Ponty which seem to me frivolously irrelevant. Costantini's essay is also brief—mercifully so, for it is tendentious and trite. I've already mentioned his wrongheaded invocation of Frank Lloyd Wright. But how about this: "an analysis of these Olmsted spaces (and, as Freud made clear, any form of analysis) is by its very nature endless." Such a formulation, trendy as it is, is intellectually beneath contempt.

I would be happiest had "Viewing Olmsted" been conceived as a "rephotography" project, in which the present-day images were juxtaposed with archival images taken of the same locations at various historical intervals. Such a project, indeed, seems to me a splendid way for the CCA to spend its donors' money. Perhaps no one at the CCA thought of it; perhaps the fancy photographers chosen wished their images to stand by themselves, and not have to work in concert with archival images (or with text); perhaps the curators did not care if anyone learned anything from the show. Yet other photographers who are just as famous and just as gifted as the "Viewing Olmsted" trio

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do not shy from—indeed, they positively embrace—the rephotography ideal.

Many of us are familiar with the rephotography projects undertaken as a series of inexpensive paperback books by Dover Publications of New York. These, in spite of their poor print quality, are as indispensable to our evolving historical understanding of cities as virtually any footnote-laden academic monograph. Even more impressive are the works of the outstanding photographer Mark Klett, whose *Photographing Oklahoma 1889/1991* (1991, Portfolio Editions for the Oklahoma City Art Museum) could well have served as a model for the CCA's Olmsted project. Another excellent model, which includes some of the sites from "Viewing Olmsted," is the photographer Peter Vanderwarker and the writer Robert Campbell's *Cityscapes of Boston* (1992, Houghton Mifflin).

I do not mean to be telling the CCA what to do. After all, this organization is the baby of Ms. Lambert, whose track record—principally, her role in convincing her father not only to hire Mies van der Rohe to design New York's Seagram Building, but also to provide Mies with the budget that allowed him to work in bronze—is well-known and admirable. And "Viewing Olmsted" is indeed an exhibition of fine photographs. (It is not as though they hired Cindy Sherman or David Levinthal or any number of other NEA darlings to undertake the work. Don't snicker. I assure you that if they had, then Herbert Muschamp would have given the show a much more positive review.)

That said, an opportunity was lost. The CCA commands the resources not merely to mount good-looking exhibitions, or even to amass impressive photographic archives, but to provide solid, disinterested, untrendy historical research and writing which posterity might value as it most assuredly will value so little else from our time.

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Music

Juilliard plays Stravinsky

by Alexander Coleman

I saw Igor Stravinsky conduct only once, at Carnegie Hall in January 1957, when the New York Philharmonic performed *Persephone* (1934), a "melodrama" in three parts, with a text by André Gide. (Vera Zorina narrated, Richard Robinson was the tenor soloist.) Stravinsky's conductorial manner lived up to its reputation for idiosyncrasy. Unlike most of the flailers and sawyers occupying major podia, Stravinsky often did not move a muscle for entire pages. Crouched over the score, he gave almost no clues to the orchestra. Every so often he would majestically raise his left hand to his lips in order to moisten the fingers for a more rapid turning of the page below. As would be expected from any professional orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, along with the soloists and mixed chorus, busied itself with an attentive sonic realization of the work at hand. A few churlish types must have asked whether, during those moments of physical stasis in front of the orchestra, any conducting at all was going on, at least in the sense that most concertgoers are wont to expect. Indeed, I vividly recall more than a few titters from the front rows; one man cast his eyes toward the ceiling, shoulders shrugged, arms outstretched with palms up, as if to ask, This is a conductor?

Now, it should be said that, on the whole, there were proper motives for such immobility. Stravinsky was husbanding his powers for some special thrusts. At first, there might be a slight hip movement, a visible body accent just at the right time; when he really got into it, he could bump and grind with the best of them. But what is certain is that at key moments, when rhythmic pointing and accentuation were most needed, his arms clawed out at the air in the direction of the brass or the winds with stunning effect. The occasional abrupt actions on the part of the composer-conductor were moments of utmost pressure applied to the orchestra, in no way an ongoing series of circular motions or generalized time-keeping. Furthermore, his apparently frail, gnomic appearance (Stravinsky was seventy-five at the time) seemed to radiate a catlike physicality and general vigilance which produced maximum rhythmic vivacity with a minimum of public gesture.

Although Robert Craft, in his numerous books on the composer, gives his own vivid descriptions of Stavinsky's conducting, he fruitfully quotes as well the amazed impression of the cellist Janos Starker, at that time first chair of the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra:

> He seemed not to be concerned with the performance at all, but to be totally enveloped in his creative inner hearing . . . these performances had nothing of the high precision which characterizes some of the brilliant Stravinsky interpretations of our days . . . entrances, dynamic nuances, and all of the customary paraphernalia of conductors we simply had to

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imagine for ourselves. But we started together, we breathed together. When the performance came to an end, a smile more like a grin appeared on the maestro's face.

In spite of the orchestra having to "imagine" its own cues, it must not be presumed that Stravinsky's ideal of instrumental performance was simply a matter of some mystical ESP with the orchestra. Even a cursory glance at the Craft volumes, or, better still, a close attention to the major Stravinsky recordings before and during the LP era, gives a good written or sonic portrait of what he wanted. On the matter of performance spaces, a long resonance time is bad for most of Stravinsky's work—one can sympathize with his wry comment about the acoustics in the Basilica of Saint Mark's in Venice: "We need blotting paper, not echo chambers." As for the performance itself, generalizations about such a rich and varied stylistic development as Stravinsky's are automatically dangerous; but it can be said that he always emphasized, in the words of Robert Craft, "tempo, rhythm, and character" in rehearsals, insisting on staccato clarity, the springing dance at the heart of all his music. And above all, the commandment, ceaselessly repeated: "Don't drag, please."

On Wednesday, February 26, the orchestra of the Juilliard School of Music performed four major works by Stravinsky, ranging from the early *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* (1920), on to two major concertos of his "neoclassic" phase, the Violin Concerto in D (1931) and the Capriccio for Piano and Orchestra (1929), and ending with the all-but-inevitable Suite from *The Firebird* (version from 1919).[1] The conductor was the young and obviously talented André Raphel Smith, now in his third season as assistant conductor of the Philadelphia Orchestra under Wolfgang Sawallisch. The equally imposing soloists for the violin and piano concertos were Yoon Kwon, violinist, and Yin-Yin Zhao, pianist. The orchestra itself, let it be said, can only be called a "student" orchestra in the most formal sense; they are, like their peers who congregate every summer at Tanglewood or other such festivals, easily on a par with most major orchestras in the United States. In point of fact, they are more suited to executing Stravinsky than their elders, say, in the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Stravinsky's musical athleticism demands either youth or the youthful in spirit.

If it was not an entirely successful concert, the fault might be ascribed to the conductor, who programmed the wickedly difficult *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* as if it really were an opener. Readers of Robert Craft's chronicles know better. The piece has been a graveyard for very distinguished conductors. Both Koussevitsky and Eugene Goosens massacred the work long ago in separate concerts, to the ongoing outrage of the composer. Later, in the Fifties, this reviewer witnessed the spectacle of the ardent champion and friend of Stravinsky, Ernest Ansermet, doing battle with the winds of the Boston Symphony in an open rehearsal of *Symphonies of Wind Instruments*. Ansermet lost.

Mr. Smith must be complimented at the very least for being wildly intrepid in opening his program with this piece. It is, in every sense, a unique part of the Stravinsky canon, beginning as an elegiac work written in response to an invitation from a French music magazine to contribute to a kind of collective "Tombeau de Debussy," who had died two years earlier in 1918. The end of the *Symphonies* as it stands was in fact the beginning and the germ of the whole composition. As Craft puts it, "working backwards, so to speak, he composed 'to the memory of Claude Achille Debussy' the *Symphonies of Wind Instruments* of which this chorale is the finale." It is good to remember in this regard that the Debussy-Stravinsky relationship was wary, but of considerable mutual admiration. Indeed,

1 The Juilliard Symphony, conducted by André Raphel Smith, appeared at Alice Tully Hall, New York, on February 26, 1997.

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Stravinsky told Janet Flanner that he had composed his ballet *Petrushka* in a Swiss garret, staring at a signed photograph of Debussy.

Made up of twelve musical seeds variously developed and contrasted, the piece strikes new ground in the almost aleatory disposition of the materials, a kind of antithesis of the sonata form, as Robert Craft has suggested. The Juilliard Symphony performance was a brave effort, but it sounded shaky and unsettled, as though the piece was under the command of neither conductor nor orchestra. Furthermore, the organization of the silences toward the end of the piece—the rests and the meticulously placed musical commas in the score—were not properly attended to. Consequently, the music did not "breathe" as it should have, and the sublime repose and majesty of the final pages were lost. (One has to go back to the magisterial recording by Stravinsky, made with the North West German Radio Orchestra and still available on Sony.[2] They got it just right.) Miss Kwon gave a splendid, gutsy Violin Concerto, clipped and pulsating where needed, retards carefully executed, stern and unsentimental in the slow arias. It was, to use Stravinsky's favorite words of praise, "clean work." Almost as impressive was the brisk and pitiless execution of the Capriccio by Mr. Zhao, done with the lightest touch imaginable.

Mr. Smith seemed to come into his own in his conducting of the Suite from *The Firebird*, although he still might not be thought of as the most ardent interpreters of Stravinsky—"Kastchei's Infernal Dance" came and went in a wink, without the proper dramatic preparation. Unlike the fussy time-keeping he gave to the two soloists, Mr. Smith brought to *The Firebird* the broadly arched gesture, the meticulously calculated lunge, the generalized vocabulary of conductorial histrionics that we concertgoers are more than used to. One can't help but think that, keeping in mind Stravinsky as conductor, less is always more.

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2 This recording from 1951, a simplified performing version of the 1920 piece which Stravinsky arranged in 1947 and which he prefered to conduct, is available on compact disc in *Igor Stravinsky 1882–1971: The Edition* (SXK46290) from Sony Classical ($332.98 for the twenty-two-disc box set).

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The Tallis Scholars in New York

by Charles Doersch

For admirers of early music, the Tallis Scholars have long been considered preeminent. Founded twenty-three years ago in London by Peter Phillips, they have made a name for themselves on five continents. And they have made that name performing composers sufficiently obscure in this century that only cognoscenti would recognize them. Around arcane four-hundred-year-old manuscripts, the Oxford-educated Phillips assembled and trained a group which has become not only the leading exponent of Renaissance sacred vocal music, but arguably its finest performers. As well, Phillips has created a cottage industry: the music label, Gimell, which solely records the Tallis Scholars, and an eighty-tours-yearly concert schedule.

So it was that expectant audiences gathered in October to hear the Tallis Scholars perform for three evenings at the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola in New York.[1] Each night was a representative tour of the sacred music from three of Europe's centers of Renaissance musical development: St. Mark's in Venice, the Chapel Royal in London, and the Hofkapelle in Vienna.

The first night's destination was the Basilica of St. Mark's which, through its succession of Flemish *maestri di capelli*, developed into a music institution of unique scope and influence. The concert's subtitle, "Lassus at St. Mark's," refers to Orlandus Lassus (1532–1594), one of the greatest masters of Renaissance music—even its culmination. Though a few contemporaries of his, such as Palestrina and Gabrieli, may be better known to us now, in his day Lassus was the most revered and famous musician in Europe. His connection, however, to St. Mark's was fleeting at best (he visited a few times). He was employed at the Bavarian court in Munich, and Germanophiles might protest this final abduction of Lassus (legend has it he was kidnapped no fewer than three times), but Phillips can perhaps be granted some artistic license in this regard. Lassus was influenced by the polychoral style of music that was becoming the rage in northern Italy in general, and at St. Mark's in particular—and he did take it to new heights. He just didn't do it in Venice. Yet could the masterpieces of the High Renaissance Flemish-Venetian polychoral tradition be presented, and not include Orlandus Lassus?

The second half of the program introduced briefly the great Adrian Willaert (c. 1490–1562), maestro at St. Mark's for thirty-five years until his death, whose work brought international renown to what had been at best a regional music center. Wil-

1 "A Tallis Scholars Festival: Sixteenth Century Sacred Polyphony from Three Courts of Europe," directed by Peter Phillips, was performed at the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola, New York, on October 21, 1996 ("Venice: Lassus at St. Mark's"), October 23 ("London: The Tudor Chapel Royal"), and October 24 ("Vienna: Music for an Imperial Court").

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laert was considered in his time the father of the polychoral school of music—which is to say, he was the earliest, best enunciator of the innovation of writing music for multiple choirs. Two pieces each then followed by Andrea Gabrieli (c. 1520–1586), organist at St. Mark's (and likely a student of Lassus in Munich), and by Cipriano de Rore, maestro briefly after Willaert (and an influence on Lassus), with a final *Magnificat* by Lassus.

For a concert on the sixteenth-century music of St. Mark's, one could hardly have asked for a more appropriate and evocative setting than the Church of St. Ignatius Loyola. The nave's granite columns with Corinthian capitals, the panels and pilasters of warm Siena and Numidian marbles, the Venetian mosaics of the baptistry and sanctuary, all recalled old Venice. As the Tallis Scholars plunged into the motet *Omnes de Saba*, the audience visibly leaned toward the five men and five women, caught by their perfectly blended sound.

There is a dreamy, otherworldly quality to polyphony which makes it hard to grasp, to catch onto. It is essentially fluid. Add to that the multiplication effect of the *cori spezzati*—the split choirs—and the expansive acoustics of a first-rate space, and one feels oneself swept away in a floodtide and ebbtide of ethereal music. Like *Omnes de Saba*, the next motet, *Alma redemptoris Mater*, reveled in the tremendous sonorities of the combined two-choir voicing, with occasional antiphony. The singers reconfigured into a seven-part choir for *Decantabat populus Israel*, which opens with cascading counterpoint, then moves into antiphonal passages involving varying clusters of voices. The first half of the program ended with *Missa Bell' amfitrit' altera*—a tribute to Venice—where Lassus gives us the works. The last perfectly tuned chord hung in the live spaces of the church above the audience. After the singers' mouths closed, the tone held on longer than one expected, and died beautifully.

Lauda Jerusalem, one of Willaert's *psalmi spezzati*, opened the second half of the evening with contrapuntal passages being shuttlecocked back and forth until, at the end, the voices blended into a remarkable unity. This was followed by two motets by Gabrieli—*Deus qui beatum Marcum* (a big, lush eight-voice motet that wasn't at all polychoral), and *Jubilate Deo* (a good example of mainline Venetian homophonic writing with antiphonal exchange). The next piece, *Descendi in hortum meum*, by Cipriano de Rore, was quite moving in its passion, longing, and sadness held tightly in a gilt latticework of canonic writing. *Hodie Christus natus est* (de Rore) followed, similarly structured, and very accomplished. The concert ended with *Magnificat sexti toni* by Lassus—in a Willaert-like *psalmi spezzati* treatment lacking the *tutti* writing more typical of Lassus. At evening's end, the audience enthusiastically called for an encore, which they received in due time.

Two nights later, the Tallis Scholars presented their concert "London: The Tudor Chapel Royal." On offer were pieces by six of the chief Tudor musicians right before, during, and immediately after the Reformation of Henry VIII. Initially, polyphony continued as the rage in Henry's court. Subsequent erratic political swings with Protestant Edward, Catholic Mary, and then politic Elizabeth acceding to the throne cast a jerking liturgical shadow through the Chapel Royal. The musicians adjusted to the exigencies of the time, working within the arbitrary constraints imposed. However, with the tolerance of Elizabeth I, English sacred music opened up into its golden age.

The creaky pews of St. Ignatius Loyola hold 1,100 souls, and, as at the previous concert, were respectably filled. First up for the evening was Renaissance London's greatest musician, Thomas Tallis (c. 1505–1585), namesake of the group. *Loquebantur variis linguis* is a respond on the plainchant for vespers at Whitsunday, and scored for seven voices with the chant in the tenor as structural scaffold. Containing the composition within the compass of twenty

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notes, Tallis's writing here is particularly complex. As Dirk Freymuth suggests in his excellent program notes, Tallis may be depicting "the Apostles testing out their fluency in all languages at once."

One way to describe the Tallis Scholars' rendition of this piece—indeed, of any Renaissance piece—compared with those by most other current groups, is that the Scholars perform by painting the music much in the same way as, say, Tallis's contemporary Hans Holbein the Younger put oils to canvas. There is no fuzziness about it; each note plays in laser clarity, cutting uncompromisingly through the air. Our late-twentieth-century ears are more accustomed to earlier music being presented by voices schooled in an Impressionist-painting performance model—notes as little daubs of oscillation.

The Jesus-antiphon *Sancte Deus* (Tallis) followed, a four-part work utilizing two treble voices with remarkable brilliance. *Jesu salvator seculi*, a hymn by John Sheppard (c. 1515–1560), was next up, set in an *alternatim* pattern, where even-numbered polyphonic verses take turns with plainchant in the bass voice. It is, appropriately, another vespers piece, this time set for All Saints' Day. The first half of the concert concluded with two Marian antiphons, the finest works of Robert Parsons (c. 1530–1570)—*Ave Maria* and (after waiting for a siren to pass down Park Avenue) *O bone Jesu*.

As in the first concert on St. Mark's, the second half of this evening also began with its oldest representative composer—the transitional figure, John Taverner (c. 1490–1545), the most influential musician of the early sixteenth century in England. In *Quemadmodum*, Taverner's towering harmonies move through passing tones into dissonance, and each dissonance being resolved became an act of grace. The next three pieces were by William Mundy (c. 1529–1591), whose writing occurred largely after the replacement of the Latin liturgy by Edward VI's first Prayer Book. Text-painting was striking here, particularly in *Adolescentulus sum ego* from Psalm 119—where the first half "I am small and have no reputation . . ." worries about in dense and imitative counterpoint only to resolve in the contrasting homophonic "Thy law is truth" at the mid-point; then, continuing, "Trouble and heaviness have taken hold upon me" frets about, only to pass through the pensive doorway of "O grant me understanding . . ." which snaps into accord, thrillingly, in the resolution, "and I shall live." Last in this concert, the large and complex psalm-motet *Conserva me, Domine* by Osbert Parsley (1511–1585) is by reputation one of his best. At its conclusion, the transported audience thundered, stomped, and shouted.

Last, and in a way strangely least, on the following night, the Tallis Scholars presented "Vienna: Music for an Imperial Court." Only three composers were selected for this concert—two of which were born prior to any of those in the earlier concerts. Hence, three-quarters of the evening was devoted to music considerably more staid than what had been presented before. For those attending all three nights, this served as a sort of anti-climax, a sense that the performance suffered a net loss in liveliness, surprise, and freshness. A shame, really, and unnecessary: had the Vienna concert led off the series, perspective would have been restored, and the ear increasingly engaged, rather than disappointed. Added to this effect, the Scholars seemed slightly less on the money. A few entrances seemed irresolute and a passing tone here or there, tentative. Still, in perspective these are quibbles in what was a fine overall performance.

First forward, and returning in the middle and at the end of the concert, Heinrich Isaac (c. 1450–1517)—a contemporary of Josquin des Prés, father of the "old school" of music (in comparison to which Willaert of Venice later was considered father of the "new school"). Isaac was appointed to the unheard-of position of Hofkomponist by Emperor Maximilian I. *Resurrexi et adhuc tecum sum*, a setting of the Introit from mass on Easter Sunday, utilized chant melodies and polyphony. *Missa de Apostolis*

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followed, a six-part mass based interestingly on Gregorian chant. Relative to previous concerts, this music was sonorous, sober, solid: plainchant alternating in strict order with polyphony. One felt the effect, like moving backward from the Gothic into the Romanesque, great stained-glass windows replaced by narrow defensive balistrariae, gravity-defying ceilings replaced by snugger intersecting vaults, flying buttresses replaced by massy walls, the Church Triumphant falling back into the Church Militant.

The second half of the concert began with *Sancte Pater*, the only piece by Ludwig Senfl (c. 1486–c. 1543), Isaac's successor as Hofkomponist to the Hapsburgs. *Tota pulchra est* (Isaac) followed, a motet adapted from a Marian antiphon, again utilizing chant melody with surrounding polyphony. Philippe de Monte (1521–1603), the only true contemporary to Lassus or Tallis in this concert, composed the next two offerings—*Super flumina Babylonis* and *Ascendens Christus*. They are Flemish in style, the first with combined double choir in eight parts, the second scored in five parts. Of the two, the second made the greater impression—with tenors and sopranos shining high in their ranges. A fine, fine performance. The concert ended with Isaac's motet *Regina caeli*.

The exceptional musicianship the Tallis Scholars displayed over the course of three October nights in New York—their organic precision, their mellifluous sound, their impeccable intonation and control—is seldom matched. Thus, when the Scholars return to Manhattan, many of us there this time will be in the audience again.

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The media

Ken Burns does Jefferson

by James Bowman

Not that I ever indulge in despair about the Future; there always have been men who have gone about despairing of the Future, and when the Future arrives it says nice, superior things about their having acted according to their lights. It is dreadful to think that other people's grandchildren may one day rise up and call one amiable.

There are moments when one sympathizes with Herod.
—Saki

Poor Saki didn't know the half of it! The crushing contempt of other people's grandchildren for his generation (and all that came before it) does not even allow him the dubious title of "amiable." History, or at least that version of history that makes it through the filter of the media culture, only rises above contempt and furious denunciation insofar as its victim-subjects may be construed—and admittedly there is a great deal of ingenuity devoted to making such constructions—as holding exactly the same views of the world as those of the media culture.

That was the redundant message of Ken Burns's two-part series for PBS, *Thomas Jefferson*.[1] Written by Geoffrey C. Ward and done in the trademark Burns style familiar from *The Civil War* and *Baseball*—only without (obviously) period photographs—it achieved its effects with the familiar, plaintive solo instrument (usually violin or piano) playing the same hymn tune over and over as accompaniment to sepia-toned prints or portraits, loads of architectural detail (has Monticello ever been so much photographed?) or videotape of misty landscapes and gently flowing rivers where, we are to imagine, the subjects once roamed. Visually, the series is monotonous but the monotony is not intolerable. Burns is essentially reversing the usual cinematic procedure by making the visuals just a kind of soothing background to the soundtrack—which consists of alternation between talking heads and readings from contemporary letters and diaries by name actors, including Sam Waterston as Jefferson and Ossie Davis, who does the narration.

The tendency of both the readings and the commentary is for the most part vaguely uplifting and inspirational with regard to Jefferson's ideas, and highly and feelingly pathetic with regard to his personal life. Burns returns again and again to Jefferson's deep love for his wife and his grief over her death, as well as the deaths of his parents, five of his six children and his best friend, Dabney Carr, with whom as a school boy he used to study under an oak tree on the hill ("Tom's Mountain" it was called then) that later was to become Monticello. "This was the real Thomas Jefferson," we are told by

1 *Thomas Jefferson*, directed by Ken Burns. Produced by Mr. Burns and Camilla Rockwell. Written by Geoffrey C. Ward. Narrated by Ossie Davis (PBS Home Video, $29.98 for the two-cassette set).

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the narration in connection with the story of his keeping a sentimentally significant passage from Tristram Shandy on a folded up piece of paper in a secret drawer beside his bed—"the man of sentiment who loved deeply, who felt deeply."

But with Jefferson it is obvious that Burns cannot keep entirely to uplift and platitudes, and he introduces in a tasteful way the note of controversy, lately given so much airing, on account of Jefferson's racial attitudes—which were, unlike the rest of his attitudes, at times less than ideally progressive. In spite of the generally favorable tone, several of the talking heads are allowed to be censorious about this, especially John Hope Franklin, a black scholar, who says that he can forgive Jefferson but that he can't forget. The white scholars enter caveats of their own: "We don't like to think," says one, "that within Jeffersonian optimism there was this dark side." My impression, just to state a contrary view, was that they liked to think it very much. It gave them all the reason they needed to feel superior to Jefferson.

This is not to deny the real problem of how one is to deal with the case of an obvious progressive, like Jefferson, who has racial views that most people nowadays consider to be repugnant. It's bad enough that he owned slaves and did not, like Washington, free them at his death. Jefferson was far too deeply in debt, and his creditors never would have stood for that. Moreover, he actually wrote (they didn't know about the problem of the paper trail in those days) that blacks were inferior, both in mind and in body, and that's very hard to get around.

Yet Burns does get around it, at least partially, by stressing the "mysteries, paradoxes and inconsistencies" of Jefferson's character. This approach was apparently suggested to him by Joseph J. Ellis, the author of a book, whose publication coincided with the series, called *American Sphinx*.[2] Its views on the subject of the third president are approximately of the order of subtlety and sophistication required to opine that, in addition to the Sphinx, he also would resemble, "if he were a painting," the *Mona Lisa*, and, "if he were a play," *Hamlet*. Ellis, a professor at Mount Holyoke, even goes so far as to say that "the pursuit of the historical Jefferson is like the pursuit of the historical Jesus," which is just about the most fatuous thing I have heard on television (where, of course, the competition is fierce) this year.

The mystery of Jefferson, the narration stresses, is supposed to lie in his being not only the champion of freedom who owned slaves, but also the believer in small government who doubled the country's size (with the Louisiana Purchase), the American patriot who loved European and especially French culture, and the president who didn't want any mention of his presidency in his epitaph. Now these hardly seem like mind-bending conundrums to me, but they do provide a kind of cover for the ultimate paradox, the one that is really on the minds of Burns and his colleagues: which is the paradox of the racist hero. As Ellis wonders out loud to the camera, "what is going on inside his head as he walks among these African-Americans?"

In fact, of course, there is no mystery about it. He was thinking, as he also wrote, that all men are not created equal in faculties, and that blacks are inferior to whites. It is a view that was all but universally held at the time—which fact might encourage us to try to understand it, if we believe that history is concerned with understanding the past. But we don't believe that. Or at least the people who are most often responsible for putting history on television don't believe it. For them, history is (as so many other things are) merely an occasion for self-congratulation, since the sole criterion on which its actors are judged is their degree of resemblance to ourselves. Such vulgar Whiggism is what lies behind Burns's mere assumption that it is impossible for a man in any period of history to

2 *American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson*, by Joseph J. Ellis; Knopf, 365 pages, $26.

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be quite a decent human being and also to hold unenlightened racial views.

This may indeed be an intellectually defensible position, but it is not consistent with the admiration that the series also has for Jefferson—or that Americans in general continue to profess for the Founding Fathers. The very progressivism by which Burns and his hand-picked stable of academic commentators have arrived at their happy state of enlightenment has its origins with Jefferson, and others who were no better than he. If the Founders were all racists, as by our present-day standards they surely all were, and if absence of racism is the sine qua non of admission into decent society, then veneration of the Founders simply cannot be justified. And where does that leave the progressive ideas that they did so much to make the common intellectual currency of the Western world, *né* Christendom?

Where, more to the point, does it leave Ken Burns and PBS, for whom the celebration of a sanitized version of the past is their bread and butter? That is why it never seems to occur to Burns to entertain any suggestion that it is only Jefferson who is tainted by the stigma of racism (a man of scientific interests, it was natural for him, but not others of the Founders, to theorize on the subject of racial differences) and thus to give him the treatment meted out by Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien in his recent book, *The Long Affair: Thomas Jefferson and the French Revolution*, which seeks once and for all to knock the Great Man off his pedestal.[3] Instead, he is driven into the arms of his (or Ellis's) "mystery man" hypothesis.

As Burns put it to Patricia Brennan of *The Washington Post*'s Sunday TV section (in words far more enigmatic than anything to be found in Jefferson's collected works),

> I would rather look at him as a hero in a classical sense, to tolerate the ambiguities and the contradiction. To invite the kind of emotional undertow that the life of Jefferson does. To be disturbed without having a final answer of how his life was. And to proceed from that. To get inside Jefferson was not to find an easy categorization that he's good or bad, but to see something much larger. There's something in Jefferson that brings out the best in us. His life is so fascinating, much like our own lives.

Well, maybe not that fascinating! For again and again the filmmaker demonstrates that even when he is most focused on Jefferson, he is thinking more of himself. Perhaps in the roguish spirit of Jean Genet, he told Ms. Brennan that

> the more we faced fairly and openly what you had to call the "crimes," the more I began to appreciate him. And as you forgive Thomas Jefferson, your love grows. During the Civil War, each side claimed the master of Monticello as their own. He's us, he's in our bloodstream. That's what these films try to be, a family album. There's nothing anyone's going to do to change the past, so the past is about now, the way you dig and what you look for, what you find. By honoring a true and honest complexity of the past, we gain the wisdom that will give us better ammunition for today. That's my statement of principle; that's who I think I am.

And how glad we all are to know that! I would give a great deal to know what the historical Jefferson would have thought about such presumption, but this is one mystery on which Burns does not speculate.

Mr. Ellis, the chief proponent of the "mystery-paradox" school of thought, if not its inventor, is fully as smug and self-absorbed as Burns himself, imagining that readers must be at least as interested in Joseph Ellis as in Thomas Jefferson. In a feature he contributed to the Sunday *New York Times*'s Arts & Leisure section (a natural home for such stuff), he confesses that he had hoped to be to *Thomas Jefferson* what Shelby Foote was to *The Civil War*—

3 See Hadley Arkes's essay on this book, "Jefferson on Race & Revolution" in *The New Criterion* for January 1997.

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and to reap a similar benefit in book sales. Alas, it was not to be. He found that "my acquired knowledge had become a burden. It created countless roadblocks to all sweeping generalizations. Instead of a creative resource, I had become an enlightened nuisance, capable only of 'yes, but' wisdom."

How awful for him! It is the sad fate, we must reflect, of the man who undertakes to explain a mystery to the simple-minded. It is strange, however, that it occurs neither to him nor to anyone else associated with the production that there is any contradiction between the mystery-man hypothesis and the self-fascination summed up in Gore Vidal's conclusion that "if there is such a thing as an American spirit, then he"—*viz.* Jefferson—"is it." Jefferson's greatness, in this view of the matter, consists in the fact that he is us, with all our faults. For are we not still racists ourselves? Clay Jenkinson, yet another of Burns's captive scholars—and probably the most frequently quoted—offers up a nice if puzzling synthesis of these two, seemingly contradictory points of view near the end when he says that

> Jefferson is the enigma of American history; he's indispensable. It's often said that Washington was the indispensable man, but it's Jefferson who's indispensable because he is mysterious, idealistic, pragmatic, misunderstood, complicated, paradoxical, hypocritical; he's the stuff of America and that's who we are and that's why Jefferson has to be the center of our national discourse.

What could be more logical? Actually, it is worth quoting Jenkinson's conclusion at greater length, since he is allowed the last word among Burns's talking heads:

> Jefferson essentially tells us that we cannot be complacent until two conditions are met. Every human being born on this continent has the right to equal, indeed identical, treatment in the machine of the law, irrespective of race, gender, creed or class of origin; and, secondly, everyone born on this continent has a right to roughly equal opportunity and modest prosperity. And until these conditions are met, we cannot rest. When these conditions are met, we may say, as Jefferson said he would, *Nunc dimittis*—now you may dismiss me. My work is done.

I am not a Jeffersonian scholar, but I would guess that it is very unlikely that Mr. Jenkinson can point to any authentically Jeffersonian documentation for that little sub-clause, "and modest prosperity"—to say nothing of the inclusion of gender and race among the list of irrelevancies before the law. The warrant for these desiderata is rather to be found in the general sense of utopianism with which Jefferson appears to inspire such latter-day idolators as Jenkinson. The latter's quotation of the prayer of St. Simeon, the *Nunc dimittis*, which Jefferson would have known as a part of the Anglican liturgy, comes without any note of its context, which was the greeting of the old covenant of Israel to the promised Messiah, Jesus Christ. Of course, it is a much more practical and useful messiah who comes not to bring eternal salvation but merely a "modest prosperity" for all.

Jefferson may have had his faults, but it is hard indeed to imagine that they included such vulgarity as that! Yet it may be that this film succeeds in demonstrating that Jefferson is even more like us than Burns supposes. Its key moment, perhaps, is in the summing up of the debt-ridden Jefferson's moral position in his post-presidential retirement at Monticello by that prober of mysteries, Clay Jenkinson:

> In about 1815, when Jefferson realized that he was insolvent, he had to choose between living the life of a patrician and doing something about slavery, which he had always said he wanted to do. And Jefferson, having looked in the face of that dilemma, chose to buy more Bordeaux wine and more books and more scientific instruments and to live in his comfortable way, and not to emancipate.

What, we may ask, is in the least mysterious about this? The mystery would

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rather be if he, unlike the rich young man in the Bible—and most of us, too—had sold all that he had for the sake of the poor and the enslaved. There is no mystery about a man taking the easy way through his twilight years—or any other years, either. Jefferson, whatever his greatnesses, was America's first limousine liberal, and the fact that his comforts were purchased at the expense of what, two hundred years later, is evidently shocking hypocrisy, has naturally troubled comfortable and prosperous champions of the poor right down to our own day. It troubled Jefferson himself, and it certainly troubles the sort of well-fed scholars who profess history on PBS.

The Burns technique is essentially to make the simple (i.e., liberal hypocrisy) mysterious and the mysterious (i.e., eighteenth-century moral perceptions) simple. It would have required a real effort of imagination to put ourselves inside the heads of Jefferson and his fellow revolutionaries, but Burns for the most part prefers to think of them as having been exactly like us. For that is the natural and inevitable inference to be drawn from the weight that he gives to ritual condemnations of racism, even though neither the word nor the concept were known at the time. It would be like some eighteenth-century man, miraculously risen from the grave and transported to our own time, condemning Burns for taking insufficient care of his "honor." Or like Garry Wills speaking of Jefferson's "crimes":

> I think the thing to remember from Jefferson is the power of the word; that ideas matter, that words beautifully shaped re-shape lives: that a person who has certain disadvantages and flaws and even crimes, like holding slaves, can transcend his imprisonment within reality by casting out words that take you into a new reality.

Surely it is precisely the point about Jefferson's slave-holding that it was *not* a crime? If it had been, his memory would not have been preserved, or, if preserved, would not have been troubling to us.

But "crime," like pretty much everything else, has only the meaning that Wills gives to it. The place of word-fabricated realities is the world not of Jefferson but of Garry Wills. It is entirely fanciful to suppose that it was "by casting out words" that Jefferson created a new reality. The reality was created, as social realities always are created, by men who were willing to kill or be killed in order to create them. Jefferson merely constructed their rationale. But why should we expect the modern academic megalomaniac to understand that? Wills takes for granted his right not only to tell the world how to govern itself, but to shuffle the "realities" by which it is governed, like a deck of cards, into any configuration pleasing to himself.

As it happened, he provided another example of this intellectual hubris by offering himself up, on *The New York Times*'s Op-Ed page, as the most shameless of journalistic apologists for Bill Clinton—another title that is still being hotly contested as I write. In "Politics by the Old Rules," Wills argues that all the irregularities in the fundraising techniques of Clinton and the Democratic National Committee are nothing more than old-fashioned, Mayor-Daley-style politics, which is how the world works. "If you don't do favors, you don't get far in politics." And, Wills continues,

> If Mr. Clinton's supporters could be paid off with a night in the White House, that was cheap. In fact, it was a refreshing change from the Reagan era, when the President gave money to the rich in tax breaks. Having the rich give money to the President is a far better arrangement.

I doubt very much that Garry Wills really does not know the difference between "favors" and graft (which he calls euphemistically "monetary favors"), or that if it were a Republican in the White House he would be so nonchalant about his taking money from rich men.

In the same way, when Clinton attempted to justify his fundraising techniques by

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pleading the urgency of saving this land from the depredations of the Republicans, to which the country would otherwise have been subject, we would be foolish not to recognize that he really does know, as a trained lawyer, that the evil intentions of Republicans have no status in law as a mitigating circumstance. The point is that the president, like Wills, simply says what he can get away with saying. And he can get away with it because neither the journalistic nor the political nor the academic culture any longer has the nerve to call nonsense and moral imbecility and intellectual frivolity by their right names.

As an example of the last-named quality, by the way, we may cite Wills's newest book, called *John Wayne's America: The Politics of Celebrity*—at least if the excerpt in *The New York Review of Books* is anything to go by.[4] Just as Ken Burns, in *Thomas Jefferson*, gives a serious historical figure the pop cultural treatment, so Garry Wills gives a pop cultural figure the serious historical treatment. But it is hard not to feel that there is the same process at work in both these highly dubious enterprises. "The Politics of Celebrity" is also the politics (and the historiography) of narcissism.

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4 *John Wayne's America: The Politics of Celebrity*, by Garry Wills; Simon & Schuster, 380 pages, $26.

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Books

Recovering Washington

by James W. Tuttleton

I herewith confess to having had an unpatriotic thought: as a youth, I was dismissive of the Father of His Country. I grew up as an impressionable boy in the age of generals Marshall, Patton, Bradley, and Eisenhower. Each of their great World War II battles in the 1940s was—or so it seemed to me—a relentless advance on the road to the unconditional surrender of the Axis powers, something every American wanted desperately. But in nine engagements with the British in an eight-year war, General Washington won only three! This was an embarrassment to national pride! A patriotic boy wants a general to win every battle and reckons little the value of strategic withdrawals, exhausting attrition, and the ultimate prize—winning the war.

Then, too, George Washington (1732–1799) always seemed so much more remote and inaccessible than most national military heroes, even though his picture, a reproduction of the portrait by Rembrandt Peale, hung on the schoolroom walls. Grant and Sherman, Lee and Jackson were nearer: one could still speak to the children of the soldiers they had commanded. Indeed, in the South, where I was reared, that war wasn't quite over in the 1940s—and may never be for certain hotheads. As to World War I, my own father, who had served in the tank corps, could tell a great many personal stories about "Black Jack" Pershing and the American Expeditionary Force in France. Washington, though, was lost in an eighteenth-century mist, and the recorded stories about him were either so preposterous ("I cannot tell a lie") or so absolutely boring that he did not inspire passionate identification and boyish enthusiasm. He was so upright and virtuous, so stiff and wooden, that national ardor had, for a boy, little of the attractively personal to fix upon.

A string of biographies, read in later life, were of little additional help to me in understanding why Washington should have generated such reverence among the revolutionary patriots who founded this nation. Parson Weems—the biographer to whom we owe the dubious story of the chopped-down cherry tree—simply apotheosized the Founder, inventing virtues and achievements that never were on land or sea. Washington Irving's five-volume *Life* (1855–1859) was considerably more reliable, but the elderly Victorian writer who produced it never really got inside his subject, although he had "met" him. This meeting occurred when his Scottish nursemaid, seeing the president on the street in New York, presented the baby Irving to Washington with the words: "Please, your honor, here's a bairn was named after you." Washington, who had no children of his own (a fact he lamented in a rough draft of his "First Inaugural Address"), is said to have touched the young Irving on the head and given him thereby the paternal blessing. A grateful nation gave him many children. My own great-great-grandfather, Washington Tuttle-

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ton, out on the frontier, was one of them—though he was not lucky enough to receive a personal blessing. Nor, for obvious reasons, did his twin, Columbus Tuttleton. But such namings were an index of the enthusiastic nationalism—now lost—that permeated American life in the first half-century of the existence of the republic.

The modern lives of Washington—the seven-volume life by Douglas Southall Freeman (1948–1957), James Thomas Flexner's *George Washington* (1965–1972), and the one-volume studies by Garry Wills (1984) and Paul K. Longmore (1988)—have more authenticity than the early hagiographies. But there is really no substitute for getting to know Washington directly, and the Library of America has now made that possible in a convenient one-volume compilation, *George Washington: Writings*.[1]

Washington, it should be said at once, did not have, like many of the Founding Fathers, the benefits of a university education. After the Revolutionary War, he was urged to write his memoirs. But, as he told David Humphreys, "I am conscious of a defective education, & want of capacity to fit me for such an undertaking." He grew up amid the Virginia gentry, but he had lost his father early, and the family was always in want of money. The youth was an excellent horseman and had a natural bent for the military. He served in the British army during the French and Indian Wars and even, at age twenty-two, earned the attention of King George II. A letter of 1754 to his brother, describing Britain's first engagement with the French, made its way into *London Magazine*: "I fortunately escaped without a wound, tho' the right Wing where I stood was exposed to & received all the Enemy's fire and was the part where the man was killed & the rest wounded. I can with truth assure you, I heard Bulletts whistle and believe me there was something charming in the sound." Horace Walpole reported the response of the king: "He would not say so, if he had been used to hear many."

He did hear a great many at the British attack on Fort Duquesne in 1755, where General Braddock was mortally wounded and the British defeated. Washington had two horses shot from under him, and four bullets ripped through his uniform. But he survived, negotiated a difficult British retreat after Braddock died, and was promoted to Colonel for his gallantry in action. Advancement in the British army was hit or miss for able American colonials, no matter how loyal to the Crown: London preferred English-born officers. So Washington retired to private life in 1758 and devoted himself to the life of a Tidewater planter. He had married by this time Martha Custis, a wealthy widow with thousands of acres and hundreds of slaves. He told Richard Washington: "I am now I beleive fixd at this Seat with an agreable Consort for Life and hope to find more happiness in retirement than I ever experiencd amidst a wide and bustling World."

During these years he farmed (unprofitably) and ran up large debts by importing expensive English goods, while at the same time making his political counsel heard in the Virginia Assembly and House of Burgesses. Although he was a slaveholder, he had no clear thoughts about slavery before the Revolution, but afterward his unvarying position was that gradual, legal emancipation was the only remedy for it: "I hope it will not be conceived from these observations, that it is my wish to hold the unhappy people who are the subject of this letter, in slavery. I can only say that there is not a man living who wishes more sincerely than I do, to see a plan adopted for the abolition of it—but there is only one proper and effectual mode by which it can be accomplished, & that is by Legislative authority: and this, as far as my suffrage will go, shall never be wanting."

He complained to his English agent that "The Stamp Act, imposed on the Colonies by the Parliament of Great Britain engrosses

1 *George Washington: Writings*, edited by John Rhodehamel; Library of America, 1,149 pages, $40.

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the conversation of the speculative part of the Colonists, who look upon this unconstitutional method of Taxation as a direful attack upon their Liberties, & loudly exclaim against the violation." When Britain closed the Boston Harbor in retaliation for the Boston Tea Party, Washington joined in the call for a general congress of colonial governments to protest English economic tyranny. As he noted in a letter to George William Fairfax,

> the Ministry may rely on it that Americans will never be tax'd without their own consent that the cause of Boston the despotick Measures in respect to it I mean now is and ever will be considerd as the cause of America (not that we approve their condt in destroyg the Tea) & though god only knows what is to become of us, threatned as we are with so many hoverg evils as hang over us at present; having a cruel & blood thirsty Enemy upon our Backs, the Indians, between whom & our Frontier Inhabitants many Skirmishes have happend, & with whom a general war is inevitable whilst those from whom we have a right to Seek protection are endeavouring by every piece of Art & despotism to fix the Shackles of Slavry upon us.

To another friend, George Mason, he observed that "at a time when our lordly Masters in Great Britain will be satisfied with nothing less than the deprivation of American freedom, it seems highly necessary that something shou'd be done to avert the stroke and maintain the liberty which we have derived from our Ancestors; but the manner of doing it to answer the purpose effectually is the point in question." The manner of doing it was prescribed by the second Continental Congress, which declared independence from Great Britain and appointed Colonel Washington as Commander in Chief of the American forces.

It would be tedious to rehearse here the many skirmishes, blockades, and battles that American colonials fought under Washington during a revolution that stretched from the "shot heard round the world" to the peace treaty with England in 1783. Suffice it to say that, in the Library of America volume, editor John Rhodehamel has given us—in addition to many private and personal letters—a splendid selection of Washington's general orders, accounts of battle, reports to Congress, and the like. These documents prove that the style is the man. Washington's prose is formal, serious, elevated, latinate, and Ciceronian in its *copia*. It is the style of an American who has absorbed the periods of Addison and Steele rather than of Laurence Sterne.

The calculated strategy of Washington and his generals was that, "on our side the War should be defensive, It has been even called a War of posts, that we should on all occasions avoid a general Action or put anything to the risque unless compelled by a necessity into which we ought never to be drawn."

But only a callow youth could fail to be moved by the reasons why the war had to be a defensive one. The problems of the commander were ruinous. He had to wheedle and cajole a powerless continental congress and thirteen different colonial goverments into giving him the men and supplies they had sworn, on their sacred honor, to provide. Washington had to deal with local militias that wanted to fight on their own terms, with large-scale desertions at harvest time or in winter, with poor housing, smallpox and dysentery, mutinies over pay, and insufficient ordnance. There were never enough cartridges, for instance, and those that were provided were often of odd sizes that did not fit the militia rifles.

General Washington was an energetic advocate of army needs, telling John Banister in 1778 that "to see Men without Cloathes to cover their nakedness, without Blankets to lay on, without Shoes, by which their Marches might be traced by the Blood from their feet, and almost as often without Provisions as with; Marching through frost and Snow, and at Christmas taking up their Winter Quarters within a day's March of the enemy, without a House or Hutt to cover

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them till they could be built and submitting to it without a murmur, is a mark of patience and obedience which in my opinion can scarce be parallel'd." But the several colonies were dilatory in assisting Washington. As the war dragged on, some were beginning to think that the Revolution had been a mistake and that peace ought to be sought, but Washington was adamant: "Nothing short of Independence, it appears to me, can possibly do."

Washington's defeat of Cornwallis at the battle of Yorktown in 1781 sealed the end of British rule in the colonies. There was great fear in America of a postwar standing army, but Washington, in retiring to Mount Vernon, reassured the colonies by maintaining that "as the sword was the last Resort for the preservation of our Liberties, so it ought to be the first thing laid aside, when those Liberties are firmly established." His victories and this indifference to political power transfigured Washington into the savior of his country. While the colonial authorities deliberated in the 1780s on what kind of constitution and republican government should be drafted, Washington urged a strong federal government.

> It now rests with the Confederated Powers, by the line of conduct they mean to adopt, to make this Country great, happy, and respectable; or to sink into littleness; worse perhaps, into Anarchy and Confusion; for certain I am, that unless adequate Powers are given to Congress for the *general* purposes of the Federal Union that we shall soon moulder into dust and become contemptable in the Eyes of Europe, if we are not made the sport of their Politicks; to suppose that the general concern of this Country can be directed by thirteen heads, or one head without competent powers, is a solecism, the bad effects of which every Man who has had the practical knowledge to judge from, that I have, is fully convinced of.

A relatively strong federal government the Founders produced, and it was a foregone conclusion that Washington would not only be elected the first president but that he would be reelected by *unanimous* votes of the Electoral College (the only president so honored). The years of his presidency (1790–1798), full of rough-and-tumble sectional politics, are splendidly represented in the Library of America collection, which gives us inaugural addresses, messages to congresses, and presidential proclamations, as well as extensive correspondence. Washington was so beloved of the people that he could do no wrong, a fact that vexed to livid irritation more mundane politicians like John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay. Washington, on whom was lavished the popular reverence once accorded to the king, shrewdly exploited his exemption from criticism, even while rivals like Vice President John Adams would jealously complain that "he was too illiterate, unlearned, unread for his station and reputation." These are the years splendidly recounted in Richard Norton Smith's new paperback version of *Patriarch: George Washington and the New American Nation*.[2] Smith wishes to reclaim Washington as a central *intellectual* force in the formation of constitutional theory and presidential prerogative. Certainly the Library of America documents make plain that Washington considered his every move in the light of its precedent-setting implication.

A somewhat different intention animates Richard Brookhiser's book *Founding Father*, which has also recently appeared in paper covers.[3] For Brookhiser, Washington's mind and his relation to the ideas that motivated his private and political conduct are well worth knowing. But more important to him are Washington's moral qualities, those aspects of unimpeachable character, that made him beloved of the nation. Brook-

2 *Patriarch: George Washington and the New American Nation*, by Richard Norton Smith; Houghton Mifflin, 424 pages, $15 paper.

3 *Founding Father: Rediscovering George Washington*, by Richard Brookhiser; The Free Press, 230 pages, $12 paper.

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hiser's work is "a moral biography, in the tradition of Plutarch," that tries to account for Washington "by looking at his nature, his morals, and his ideas." He gives us an excellent account of Washington's "nature" —his stature (six feet three), his oval face and fair complexion, his bad teeth and stoic temperament, his reserved demeanor, his explosive temper, etc. But of preeminent importance to Brookhiser are the principles which Washington brought to bear on this nature and their effect on the formation of his character.

When he was about fifteen, Washington appears to have copied out a translation of "Bienséance de la Conversation entre les Hommes," a list of 110 prescriptions compiled in a French Jesuit treatise of 1595 and translated into English by Francis Hawkins, whose London text, called "Rules of Civility & Decent Behaviour in Company and Conversation," went through some ten editions between 1640 and 1672. These rules established some of the forms of polite behavior that would have been essential knowledge to a rising young Virginian. *George Washington: Writings* offers the "Rules of Civility" as the first document in the collection, even though Washington is not its author.

These rules are such as one might imagine: "Shift not yourself in the Sight of others nor Gnaw your nails"; "Shake not the head, Feet, or Legs rowl not the Eys lift not one eyebrow higher than the other wry not the mouth, and bedew no mans face with your Spittle, by approaching too near him when you Speak"; "Put not your meat to your Mouth with your Knife in your hand neither Spit forth the Stones of any fruit Pye upon a Dish nor Cast anything under the table."

But a great many other rules suggest the fundamental sensitivity to others that defined Washington's true character. The first rule is "Every Action done in Company, ought to be with Some Sign of Respect, to those that are Present." From this follow other forms that come to signify gentlemanly behavior: "Superfluous Complements and all Affectation of Ceremonie are to be avoided, yet where due they are not to be Neglected"; "When you deliver a matter do it without Passion & with Discretion, however mean y^{e} Person be you do it too"; and "In the Presence of Others Sing not to yourself with a humming Noise, nor Drum with your Fingers or Feet."

These rules were not only useful in forming the character of our first president, according to Brookhiser, they are still pertinent today—especially since public civility seems to have gone up in smoke. In fact, so valuable are these rules to Mr. Brookhiser that he has separately edited and published them, adding a commentary indicating their modern pertinence.[4] For instance, Rule 2: "When in company, put not your hands to any part of the body not usually discovered. *A rule often flouted by rap singers, and pitchers.*" (Need we reflect on Madonna or Michael Jackson?) Or Rule 72: "Speak not in an unknown tongue in company but in your own language and that as those of quality do and not as the vulgar. Sublime matters treat seriously. *'Unknown tongue' also applies to jargon, or the slang of one age group. Don't go on and on about Woodstock to kids, or 'zines to adults.*" Obviously many of Washington's rules would improve the quality of public life today, but it seems hopeless to try to educate an American public in thrall to the coarsest offenders against taste who can be found. Mr. Brookhiser wonders, "What use is etiquette in an age of daytime televison and drive-time radio?" Even so, he gives a spirited defense of good manners. I was convinced until he pointed out that nowadays "presidents are seen in jogging shorts, and even tell us about their underwear." How remote—but increasingly attractive—seems Washington in his Augustan dignity.

Although Washington's personal civility seems lost on the modern age, he taught the

4 *Rules of Civility: The 110 Precepts That Guided Our First President in War and Peace*, edited by Richard Brookhiser; The Free Press, 90 pages, $16.

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nation two lessons that have sustained the republic. The first rule every military commander (with the exception of the Confederates and General MacArthur) has scrupulously obeyed. And that is the rule that military power remains subordinate and standing before the elected and seated civil authority. When Washington, at the height of his wild popularity, resigned his commission to the Congress and retired to Mount Vernon, a veritable Cincinnatus of his age, he made possible a popular republican, rather than a one-man, dictatorial style of government. Likewise, his decision not to extend his term as president in the "Farewell Address" of 1796, brought home to his countrymen that it would be disastrous for "the minds of men to seek security and repose in the absolute power of an Individual," an individual who then might try to maintain "his own elevation, on the ruins of Public Liberty." Washington's repeated expressions of unworthiness and diffidence and his conspicuous surrender of appointed and elected power made it plain that, in a republic, power derives from the consent of the governed, is transiently exercised by those so entrusted, and in due course must be handed on to others whom the people, in their political wisdom, choose to name.

Cicerones in a minefield

Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth, editors The Oxford Classical Dictionary, Third Edition. Oxford University Press, 1,640 pages, $99.95

reviewed by Hugh Lloyd-Jones

When at the age of about ten I began to show an interest in the ancient world, my father bought me a classical dictionary, "containing a copious account of all the proper names mentioned in ancient authors, with the value of coins, weights and measures used among the Greeks and Romans, and a chronological table." The book bore no date, though the copy I was given had obviously been printed not long before, and it was not until much later that I discovered that it had first appeared in the year before the French Revolution. Its author, the Rev. John Lemprière, D.D., records the doings of characters of myth and history alike in the same ceremonious Gibbonian prose and in the same grave tones of judicious appraisal; Cyclops and Caligula, Priapus and Elagabalus, Medusa and Messalina seemed to inhabit the same world. Ancient biographies are nothing if not anecdotal; no less a person than Aristotle held that anecdote was illustrative of character, and this gave license to a horde of minor writers. Lemprière feasts his readers on the rich stores of ancient tittle-tattle. Aeschylus died when an eagle mistook his bald head for a rock and tried to crack on it the shell of a captured tortoise; Euripides was torn to pieces by raving dogs, just as his character Pentheus was torn to pieces by raving women; Lucretius, who concludes the fourth book of his poem with an attack on love, was poisoned by a love philter, and so on. Lemprière's bibliography is that of his own time; he informs his readers that the best edition of Aeschylus is that of Thomas Stanley, published in 1663.

Fanciers of Lemprière usually turn first to his lives of the more outré Roman emperors and empresses. Caligula made his horse high priest and consul (in fact, he is said by two not entirely reliable historians to have planned the horse's promotion), and constantly fed wild horses with human victims; the emperor "appeared in public places in the most indecent manner, committed incest with his three sisters, and established public places of prostitution." The horse story, like the story that Nero "served one of his retainers as a catamite," is told also of Elagabalus, who "was not satisfied with following the plain laws of nature." "Few men at Rome," Lemprière tells us, "could not boast of having enjoyed the favors of the impure Messalina"; in her time the population of Rome was already more than one

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million. I was delighted with the book, which was probably responsible for my becoming a classical scholar; I have heard that it had had the same effect on Housman. But it cannot be said to incorporate the results of the most recent research, so that a parent in my father's situation would be unwise to present it to his child as an instrument of study.

What handbooks could one nowadays recommend to him? If one wants a biographical dictionary of the ancient world, *Who Was Who in the Greek World* and *Who Was Who in the Roman World*, both edited by Diana Bowder (1982), are very useful books, with good illustrations. If you want a general encyclopedia at an advanced level, and if you know German, there is *Der kleine Pauly* (1979), a condensation into five small volumes of the gigantic German encyclopedia of the ancient world in well over a hundred volumes, that is known as Pauly-Wissowa. But nothing seems to have come of the plan for an English version of this that was talked of some years ago; a new condensation on a much larger scale, called *Der neue Pauly*, will also exist only in German.

The most useful one-volume dictionary of the ancient world in English has for many years been the *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, whose first edition appeared in 1949, followed by the second in 1970. The new third edition, though, has been very largely rewritten, being 20 percent larger than its predecessor, and having more than eight hundred new entries. It is all written in the English language, but its 364 contributors are drawn not only from English-speaking countries, but from all countries where classical antiquity is studied. What the editors in their introduction call "a certain top-heaviness in favor of the purely literary aspects" of ancient culture has been effectively corrected; the new edition deals not only with literature but with archaeology, art, history, law, religion, philosophy, linguistics, science, and mathematics. It gives extended coverage to regions beyond the core areas of Greece and Italy, and to cultures which interacted with those of Greece and Rome. Eighteen "Area Advisors" are named as having been responsible for different aspects of ancient culture; for the most part these are noted experts. Much of the old dictionary has been preserved, but it has often been expanded and has been carefully brought up to date, with the addition of much valuable bibliography. With moving piety, Simon Hornblower, one of the two main editors and one of the leading modern experts on Thucydides, has retained what he calls a classic article on that writer by H. T. Wade-Gery. An article that I have always considered classic, that of J. D. Denniston on Greek meter, has been replaced by a new entry by one of the best modern authorities on the subject, Laetitia Parker; her article gives more information, but is more difficult for the comparative beginner. Professional scholars will find the book indispensable. But how will the book serve the general reader? Even the kind of reader for whom Lemprière would still serve well will find it more useful than any other modern work of the same kind in English that is known to me, provided he knows how to skip. But in some places the old dictionary was kinder to such a reader; some of its articles about poets show more feeling for the poetry than do their learned replacements. Some of the new ones fail in this respect; in particular, a disappointing treatment of Pindar gives one no idea of why he is considered a great poet—something I tried to explain in a lecture, which can be found in my book *Greek in a Cold Climate* (Barnes and Noble), not mentioned in the scrappy bibliography appended to the article in this book. The cultivated general reader needs a real classical dictionary, since he cannot rely on general encyclopedias for information about the ancient world; for example, the otherwise admirable *Columbia Encyclopedia* is in this department of knowledge deplorably inadequate.

The reader will wish to know how the dictionary handles certain topics now markedly fashionable and therefore often treated

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with rich absurdity. The Area Advisor responsible for "women's studies," Helen King, deserves credit for the sensible treatments of "women," "gynecology," "marriage," "prostitution," "hetairai," and "pornography." D. M. Halperin, writing on "homosexuality," Amy Richlin on "sexuality," and H. N. Porter on "heterosexuality," rightly point out that the ancients classified sexual behavior as active or passive rather than as heterosexual or homosexual, so that the latter pair of terms are not strictly applicable, though Porter discreetly adds that "this remains controversial." Though there are brief articles on Ethiopia and Nubia, there is, surprisingly, no article on blacks in the ancient world; the editors would have done well to secure a treatment of this topic by the leading modern authority, Frank M. Snowden, Jr., author of *Blacks in Antiquity: Ethiopians in the Greco-Roman Experience* (1970, many times reprinted). This learned book is totally free from the kind of speculative matter written by people with a political agenda but small qualification to write about the ancient world. Such speculations have been conclusively refuted by Mary Lefkowitz in *Not Out of Africa* and by Lefkowitz and G. M. Rogers in *Black Athena Revisited* (both 1996).

One of the youngest Area Advisors, Emily Kearns (religion), has done a notably good job. I remarked with interest that the advisors for Latin literature were a husband and wife team, D. P. and P. G. Fowler. Not long ago, D. P. Fowler in the *Times Literary Supplement* made disparaging remarks about the younger generation of German classical scholars, causing me to reflect that I could think of a very fair number of young German classical scholars whose work, both in quality and quantity, seemed to me to stand up rather well to comparison with Dr. Fowler's own production. These two scholars have contributed to the volume an account of "literary theory and classical studies," which is one of the longest articles in the book; they offer "not so much a path through the minefield as a way in." Traditional classical philology, they believe, "received its classic formulation" in 1872–3 from the twenty-four-year-old Wilamowitz in his pamphlets against Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*. Wilamowitz's essay was reprinted, together with the other contributions to the unedifying controversy which Nietzsche's book provoked (the most moderate of the participants was Richard Wagner), in Karlfried Gründer's *Der Streit um Nietzsches "Geburt der Tragödie"* (1969). Classical philology contains, the Fowlers sportingly allow, "much of which the discipline can be proud"; but they complain that it assumes

> the scientific objectivity of the critic, the focus on the surface psychology of the author, the belief that all "clues" will point to a single coherent picture, the aspiration to that overall master interpretation, and especially the belief that the hermeneutic tools used to interpret texts are timeless, based on the commonsense rules used in ordinary life.

With this they contrast theories which they classify as "foundational" or "methodological"; "the former tackle the basic assumptions of critical practice, . . . while the latter provide new things to do with texts rather than new reasons to do them." They then describe the various types of theory—structuralism, narratology, "intertextuality" (Julia Kristeva, we learn, is the inventor of this unpleasing and unnecessary bit of jargon), poststructuralism, deconstruction, and postmodernism. "In a sense," they remark, "there is no further step beyond post-modernism for criticism to take." Just so; it has been said that "the modernist says that we can never get it right, but must go on trying, but the post-modernist just gives up."

There is nothing new about postmodernism, which closely resembles the extreme skepticism, then called Pyrrhonism after the founder of the ancient school of Skeptics, which was in vogue for the half-century between the publication of Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique* in 1695–7 and that of Montesquieu's *De l'Esprit des lois* in 1748; Samuel Johnson and, at one stage, Voltaire

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both upheld it. Some people have accepted postmodernism on the ground that it leaves everyone free to write his own history; they should remember that then there is no reason why that history should be believed. The obvious objection to such a notion of personal narrative was briefly expressed by a speaker at a recent conference at the New York Academy of Sciences, who said, "Either Grant surrendered to Lee or Lee surrendered to Grant." (For the proceedings of that conference, see *The Flight from Science and Reason*, edited by Paul R. Gross, Norman Levitt, and Martin W. Lewis [1996].)

The Fowlers go on to offer brief remarks about Marxism (leading up to Foucault, New Historicism, and Bakhtin), the use of psychoanalysis (from Freud to Lacan), and finally feminism. All these things they describe with a clarity notably absent from the writings of most proponents of such theories, so that the Fowlers' article can save unbelievers from a large amount of trouble; for those to whom they have shown the way into the minefield, they have made it easier than most believers do to find the way out. Despite the Fowlers' faith in modernity, they have also contributed to the book a good article on Lucretius and an article on Virgil that is respectable, though not as good as that of S. E. Hinds on Ovid.

Satyr & family man

Michael Holroyd
Augustus John: The New Biography.
Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 715 pages, $40

reviewed by Guy Davenport

Augustus John's largest canvas, unfinished at his death in 1961 (at age 83), still sits in his studio at Fryern Court in Dorset, spray-painted over by vandals. It is a large composition inspired by the French philosopher Charles Fourier (1772–1837) in whose utopian plan for a wholly new order of society John discovered late in life a prophetic description of the way he had actually lived, believed, and exulted. He had been as messily and chaotically a bohemian as Joyce Cary's Gulley Jimson, as adulterous as Zeus, and as pragmatically moral as his favorite people, the Gypsies.

And yet if we knew little of his life—which resembles nothing so much as a novel by Iris Murdoch about the enigmas and hygiene of muddled passions and bedeviled consciences—we could say that he was a portrait painter whose chief concern (as Sir John Rothenstein insisted) was civic order and dignity, as well as a lyric visionary whose beautiful women and children are the most charming (and romantic) in modern European art, not quite to be placed beside Mary Cassatt, but nearby.

Portraiture can bestow symbiotic fame: Charles I and Van Dyck are historical molecules, as are Carlyle and Whistler, Erasmus and Holbein, Isabella d'Este and Leonardo. There are lord mayors in England whose memory depends on their portraits by Augustus John. We can illustrate a record of English writing in our century with John's portraits of Yeats, Dylan Thomas, Hardy, Lytton Strachey, and practically all the rest. Joyce spent an uncomfortable hour posing for his most sensitive image, believing that he was being exploited and his fierce dignity molested by John's familiarity and a friendly hug. Ronald Furbank was too shy to last out his sitting. Queen Elizabeth II laid on a string quartet (the Renaissance touch) but John was too discombobulated by palace protocol ever to finish the commission. John "always got a likeness" (the safe thing to say) and hence was overworked by rich Americans and sitters for perfunctory canvases. Field Marshal Sir Bernard Montgomery complained that his ears were "in the wrong place" and that he'd heard that the painter was a womanizer.

Is John's Lady Ottoline Morrell a caricature or a cruelly insightful diagnosis of Bloomsbury *hauteur*? His Streseman seems to be an actor playing Streseman. His H. C. Dowdall (Lord Mayor of Liverpool) is not at all certain that he ought to be fool enough to pose for John or as Lord Mayor

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of Liverpool. Shaw closed his eyes. Thomas Barclay is aristocratically stoic, knowing that he will hang in a board room, and Joseph Widener will never forgive whoever talked him into sitting for the painter.

For John is always there, chuckling and swearing, his stabbing Gypsy's eye sizing up the horse for which a deal must be made. The subjects John liked got some of the best portraits of the century—Joseph Hone, Tommy Earp, Jane Harrison, William McElroy, Arthur Symons. Against these fine portraits the honest critic must place the stiff formal work: T. E. Lawrence, the Emir Feisal, the Marchesa Casati. Did John add anything to the art of portraiture? No. He worked athwart modernism and all its styles. Nowhere in his output is there anything close to Picasso's Gertrude Stein or Wyndham Lewis's Eliot, nothing like Tchelitchev's Edith Sitwell or Stanley Spencer's Dame Mary Cartwright.

Michael Holroyd, a man outside the universities (while exemplifying everything that ought to be in them), began his career writing the biography of the forgotten biographer Hugh Kingsmill, and then took on Lytton Strachey, as mercurial and elusive a subject as the art of biography might find among the English, and then built, in three volumes, his epic Bernard Shaw. This new biography of John is a revision of two volumes published in 1974 and 1975. Much new archival material had come to light, people close to John had died, and possessive collectors had succumbed to indifference and mortality.

Holroyd is diligent. He has worked in everything that could be found out. He'd missed knowing John, though he collided with him on a London corner when John was drunk and tottery. But he had moved in John's world in his other biographies. There was the family (a tribe of children by a harem, two of whom were wives, some legitimate and many *demijohns*, several still uncounted—the scholars are still counting the offspring of Shelley). There was the parallel world of John's sister Gwen, a splendid painter who has been coming into her own. John liked to say that he would be remembered, if at all, as the brother of Gwen John, who was as reclusive as John was public, and as meticulous as John was slapdash.

John was born in Wales in 1878 into a thoroughly Victorian family densely commercial, religious, and comfortable. A novelist would never have shaped John's life the way it happened. His life had no shape: it had a momentum that eschewed a forward course and plunged into zigs and zags. Everything's all right until John gets to the Slade School of Art, becomes its crack draftsman, as authentic a genius as his friend Wyndham Lewis. Sex came shyly at first (if you can believe it), and then raged. The old John recognized himself in Fourier's Calculus of the Passions: he was a Butterfly (a satyr, a Don Giovanni) combined with The Family Man (a David, a Solomon). He was also a Gypsy; John could speak several dialects of Romany, and was something of a scholar of their folkways.

So that as this shapeless biography gets into its first steam, we see John, two wives and two mistresses, and the first wave of biological development—all boys and all bedded down in cardboard boxes in a room on the rue Monsieur-le-Prince. John's womenfolk got along with each other; babies were born while John was making another. For the rest of his life there would be children underfoot. They grew up well, by and large, to be air aces in the Battle of Britain, an admiral, an architect ("I thought, you see, that I might have to design an insane asylum for the whole family").

There was a day any filmmaker might envy when a Gypsy caravan drawn by New Forest ponies drew up at a boys' school in Dorsetshire. Dorelia John in Pre-Raphaelite finery dismounted and began to unload boys in togs of her own making (some were wearing clothes and shoes for the first time), boys in purple, green, and yellow velvet ("the Persians" the school called them). The schoolmaster watched as one

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boy emerged, two, three, on up to five, all with wild mops of hair. They were all fluent in French and could recite the principle parts of lots of Latin verbs; none had ever set foot in a school before. As they had had to fight each other for food and a place to sleep, they turned out to be more than a match for the hazing by their schoolmates that was inevitable, and a kind aunt came to their rescue with Christian clothes and British shoes.

There are many such cinematic moments (John and John Quinn motoring across France, with the high comedy of John's driving and Quinn's realization too late that this was no adventure that a prim New York lawyer and collector ought to have agreed to; Rupert Brooke hastening into Cambridge to bring back Lytton Strachey to see John's family camped out in Grantchester, Arcadia for all to see), but what does it all mean? One can see Holroyd packing in everything that came to hand—John's own autobiographies, William Rothenstein's *Men and Memories*, from which Holroyd bites raw chunks that don't always digest. From George Moore's *Confessions*, for example, he takes a description of café life in Paris. "The usual marble tables are there," Moore writes, "and it is there that we sat and aestheticized 'till two o'clock in the morning." This becomes in Holroyd "sitting through . . . long summer evenings until completely 'aestheticized' by two o'clock the following morning." Moore is reporting conversations among artists; Holroyd thinks he's talking about getting soused. There are similar paraphrases from Rothenstein and others that are only slightly varied and with details that have slipped out of place in the copying.

The massive biographies that are the style nowadays risk the paradox of losing, or hiding, their subjects in an avalanche of words. A short life of John by, say, a Strachey or a Hazlitt, could at least keep John's energy and exuberant spirit to the fore. Holroyd warns us that this is not a book about John's painting and sculpture. Well, it helplessly is and regrettably isn't. The many studios are here, but no paint or brushes, no stretching of canvases, no turps, linseed oil, or palette knives. No schedules—did John finish a painting all in a few hours, like Van Gogh, or dab at it for weeks like Cézanne? Did he progress from period to period (apparently not)? Why did he give everybody Cupid's-bow lips? Was it El Greco alone who made his figures much taller than life? Aside from his womenfolk and children, did he ever choose a subject for a portrait out of friendship or admiration?

In any painter's work there is a discernible psychology and iconographic vocabularies. Painters have hearts and minds. Can Fourier and Gypsies account for all of John's world outside the portrait studio? Holroyd is aware that John's painting is out of fashion and that it is something of an embarrassment to historians of British art. He wisely saw, however, that John's life was a comedy of much color and humanity. It engaged with many interesting people (Dylan and Caitlin Thomas, Henry Tonks, Wyndham Lewis, the Rothensteins father and son, Henry Lamb, John Quinn) and it is as a comedy, with intervals of pathos, that this biography succeeds. To have been so busy as a portraitist in the age of photography, and to have lived so freely on one's own terms in the worst of centuries are reasons enough for meriting a long and sympathetic biography.

"Such talents, such a mess"

Kenneth S. Lynn
Charlie Chaplin and His Times.
Simon & Schuster, 604 pages, $35

reviewed by Jeremy Murray-Brown

In the spring of 1915, within days of a bungled British attempt to "knock Turkey out of the war" by an attack through the Bosphorous, World War I having not yet lasted a year, children in the streets of London were singing this song:

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O the moon shines bright on Charlie Chaplin
Whose boots are crackin'
For want of blackin'
And his little baggy trousers need a-patchin'
Before they send him
To the Dardanelles.

My father knew the song. He must have heard it in one of the vaudeville or music-hall shows that flourished then in every town and city in Britain. He was four years younger than Chaplin and came of age on the eve of the First World War. Years later he used to regale his family with it.

The song can be found in several books on Chaplin, though with slightly different words, and it appears again in Kenneth S. Lynn's new biography, *Charlie Chaplin and His Times*. It is a telling reminder of how early in his life Chaplin found fame and fortune. In 1915, at the time of the Dardanelles fiasco, he was only twenty-six years old. Born in 1889, he first came to America in 1910 as a member of one of Fred Karno's vaudeville troupes. On a second visit late in 1912, he caught the eye of Mack Sennett and began work in what was still a raw film business. By 1918, he had appeared in more than sixty films (one or two reelers). The demand for a Chaplin film, it seemed, both inside and outside America, could not be satisfied fast enough. Other comedians were quick to imitate him, stores sold figurines and other spin-offs based on his trademark appearance, and his earnings rocketed. Sennett's Keystone film company paid him $175 a week; Essanay, $1,250; Mutual, $10,000 (plus a transfer fee of $150,000). In 1918, in a much publicized deal with First National, he became a millionaire with a contract to make eight films over a period of eighteen months. He was not yet thirty. Not bad for a young Cockney from a south London poor-law school whose earliest ambition was to be top of the bill in a West End music hall!

Chaplin's celebrity status stayed with him for the rest of his life despite his being in effect expelled from the United States in 1952 when scandals with women and underage girls and questions about his political loyalty led to the withdrawal of his American reentry permit. In the 1920s and 1930s, he was the most famous man in the world, mobbed in London and Paris, sought out by presidents, prime ministers, and celebrities in other professions. Money gave him the independence to do what he wanted in his films and live like a prince or a pasha, with a Japanese chauffeur and private sauna, a yacht in California, his own studio in Hollywood, and his own distribution company, United Artists, which he co-founded in 1919 with Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, and D. W. Griffith.

Something about Chaplin, however, lifted him out of the company of his fellow artists in the film world. When he died in 1977 in Switzerland, where he went to live after leaving the United States, he had already become an institution, honored belatedly by Hollywood, knighted in Britain, the subject of many books, memoirs, and academic studies. The flow of these has continued unabated since his death. In 1985, the film historian David Robinson drew on the Chaplin archive for his definitive work on Chaplin film lore, *Chaplin: His Life and Art*, while a more general biography by Joyce Milton, *Tramp: The Life of Charlie Chaplin*, appeared as recently as last year.

Little about Chaplin's life and art has remained unscrutinized in this long-running spate of words. In tackling the subject afresh, Lynn has not unearthed anything that sheds a radically new light on the filmmaker or his times, but he is an experienced literary historian who has carefully sifted through what others have written about Chaplin to form his own interpretation of the man. The result is a Chaplin notably lacking in glamour. While Chaplin's films may still work their magic, the conjurer who made them is stripped of mystery and charm.

As Lynn tells it, there is not much that was edifying about Chaplin's private or off-screen public life. It was often sordid, contentious, petty. He was a rotten husband, a

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poor father, an unpleasant, mean, and sometimes dishonest business man. His moodiness on the film set was legendary. Lynn constantly finds it necessary to correct Chaplin's own account of events in his life. But underneath these "layers of obfuscation and prevarication" with which Chaplin covered his past Lynn believes that he was after all a "profoundly autobiographical" filmmaker. In other words, for Lynn, the art helps explain the life.

Lynn's previous biography was a widely acclaimed study of Ernest Hemingway in which he proposed that the disconcerting nature of Hemingway's life can be attributed to what happened to him when he was a child and his mother dressed him as a little girl. In his new book, Lynn also starts from the premise that the key to understanding Chaplin's enigmatic personality lies in probing his relationship with his mother. He finds support for this approach in the writings of Thomas Burke, a man who apparently understood better than anyone Chaplin's feelings about his London childhood. They spent many hours together in 1921 and 1931 when Chaplin returned to the streets of Kennington and Lambeth he knew as a boy. Burke's chapter on Chaplin in his *City of Encounters*, published in 1932, remains one of the best things written about him.

The story of Chaplin's childhood has been told many times over, and notably by Chaplin himself in *My Autobiography*, which he published in 1964 and which is still in print in paperback. According to Chaplin, his father was a music-hall artist in Victorian London who deserted his mother and drank himself to death. Chaplin's mother also moved in theatrical circles, but gradually found herself unable to cope with life, drifted into insanity, and had to be committed to an asylum. With other men, she had other children. One of these was Chaplin's half-brother Sydney, four years his senior, to whom Chaplin was devoted. They lived with their mother for a time in various tenement rooms, but were eventually consigned to poor-law schools and workhouses and had to fend for themselves. (In 1921 Chaplin brought his mother to America, where she later died.) The young Charlie found small parts on the stage and in vaudeville thanks to a middle-aged actor-director who introduced him to Karno. Then came the fateful tour of America with its grinding routine of vaudeville appearances in towns throughout the United States.

That this background provided Chaplin with material that found its way into his films is a venerable thesis for Chaplin's critics. Burke was one of the first to point to the connections. Lynn is more skeptical of Chaplin's "allegedly wretched" life as a boy in late Victorian London, what he calls his "myth of bottom-of-the-heap impoverishment," though he, too, frequently refers to the special circumstances of Chaplin's upbringing. But while Burke believed that the experiences suffered by the fourteen-year-old Chaplin were the key to his films, Lynn takes them to be the key to Chaplin's life, and particularly to his behavior toward women. And where Burke wrote that it was only a guess, Lynn develops the argument with considerable dramatic license. Was the trauma then the loss of his mother to insanity? Is sexual abuse or incest also implied? Or was it doubts about his parentage, about his mother's real trade?

It seems we will never know for certain the actual facts about Chaplin's upbringing. The documentary record is spotty but suggestive enough to fuel Lynn's portrait of a "sexually ravenous young man" at the outset of a career. At the end of the chapter that explores the early period of his life, titled "The Poisonous Wound" after a phrase of Burke's, Lynn describes an episode from Chaplin's first visit to Paris, made in 1909 when he was twenty. He was staying in the same hotel as a young dancer from the Folies-Bergère called Mabelle Fournier, who was chaperoned by her mother. In his autobiography, Chaplin describes how the mother made a pass at him to which he was in all innocence unresponsive. But Lynn

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goes on to quote another version of the encounter that Chaplin gave a friend some twenty years after the event. The girl was ten or twelve, according to Chaplin in this account, and her mother allowed Chaplin to comfort her daughter when she suffered from violent nosebleeds. "I just loved to caress and fondle her—not passionately—just to have her in my arms." Lynn concludes the chapter this way:

> With girls as young as Mabelle Fournier, Chaplin never had to worry about rejection, or betrayal, or about being adjudged inadequate. Never would he forget that his sense of not knowing what to do while gripped in his mother's frantic embraces had made him feel like screaming. But lying for hours with Mabelle's virginal slimness, her wholly girlish femininity, enveloped in his arms was very heaven.

Chaplin's relations with women were notorious, and Lynn describes them in detail. The reader uninterested in being a voyeur of these activities may find some passages unnecessarily explicit. But it is in keeping with Lynn's psychosexual theme to show us a Chaplin whose private life was often in turmoil at the very moments of greatest artistic creativity. He was furiously engaged in sex and politics while thinking up ideas for his films.

Chaplin had four wives, though "the overwhelming likelihood," Lynn writes, is that he and Paulette Goddard, his third wife, were never legally married. As Lynn describes it, when making *The Gold Rush* Chaplin was "caught up in a sex-powered delirium" in his pursuit of a young girl, Lillita McMurray, who became his second wife, taking the professional name of Lita Grey. She was twelve years old when Chaplin first met her and at fifteen still under age when he—then thirty-five—first slept with her. When she found she was pregnant, he tried everything to persuade her to have an abortion or get out of his life, but was virtually blackmailed into marriage by Lita's uncle, a tough lawyer. Two sons were born of this marriage. In 1943 he married Oona O'Neill, daughter of the famous playwright, who promptly disowned her. At that time, Chaplin was plagued with a paternity suit by another woman, which the court adjudicated in her favor despite blood tests that contradicted her claim. (California did not recognize such tests in those days.) Oona and Chaplin remained married for thirty-four years, until Chaplin's death. She brought him happiness, gave him eight children, and nursed him in his eighties. But after Chaplin's death, Lynn writes, Oona "snapped" and gave way to alcoholic dementia, proof to Lynn that she, too, succumbed to the stress of living with the man she fell in love with when she was seventeen and he fifty-three, a year younger than her father. She died in 1991, aged sixty-six.

The second major theme that weaves its way through this biography concerns Chaplin's attitude toward Communism and the Soviet Union. It was what got him into trouble in the opening years of the Cold War, and it has been well worked over in other studies of him. Lynn has looked carefully at the connections that might have existed between the filmmaker and the Kremlin without turning up convincing evidence that Chaplin was a Soviet agent or received secret funds from Soviet paymasters. But he makes the valid point that in his public utterances Chaplin followed the Soviet party line as dutifully as any party member, on one occasion even praising the Soviet purges of the Thirties.

That was in 1942, after Hitler's onslaught on the Soviet Union, when Stalin was pressing the Western democracies to start a second front. But Lynn also points to the famous speech given by the Jewish barber at the end of *The Great Dictator*, a passionate appeal for an end to fighting, which in America meant continued neutrality. Chaplin, Lynn points out, shot this scene at his Hollywood studio in June 1940, just one week after the fall of France. The Nazi-Soviet pact was still in force, Hitler was master of the continent of Europe, Presi-

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dent Roosevelt faced a reelection campaign in which America's neutrality was a major issue, and Britain's future with that of the free world hung in the balance. The speech, then, in Lynn's words, "perfectly complemented the Communist line in the pact period." After *The Great Dictator*'s release in October 1940, Chaplin repeated the speech in a radio broadcast to an audience, Lynn writes, of sixty million Americans. In pamphlet form, it also made excellent propaganda for the Communist Party in Britain.

At this distance in time, Lynn is inclined to believe that Chaplin's ideological posturing, "the breathtaking naïveté" of his public utterances, must be attributed to the strivings of a "dilettante radical" who wanted to be taken seriously by left-wing intellectuals. "Flapdoodle" is Lynn's term for the final speech in *The Great Dictator*. Obviously Chaplin was a subversive—in every film his screen character undermines the powers that be. At the very core of his being was the instinct to be "against the government" or "bolshy," as an earlier generation called it. Churchill, no friend of real Bolsheviks, admired Chaplin as a comedian, but seems not to have taken his politics seriously. Lynn, however, is surely right to point out that the real charge against Chaplin is not that he once held radical views, but that he sought to sanitize them when he came to write his autobiography in 1964.

Chaplin's status as a world celebrity rested on the unique personality of the screen character he first created in February 1914. In the era of silent film, common people the world over warmed to "the little fellow" (Chaplin's preferred term for the tramp) in his baggy trousers with his hat and cane. The mime and slapstick required no translation to be understood by other cultures speaking other languages, and by all classes, too. Lynn and others who print the music-hall song about sending Charlie to the Dardanelles do so in the context of describing how Chaplin was attacked by sections of the British press for shirking his duty to sign up for the trenches in World War I. This is not, however, how I understood the song from listening to my father sing it. The meaning he gave it reflected the feelings of British tommies ridiculing the brass hats who were making such a mess of the war, feelings so successfully recaptured in Joan Littlewood's *O What a Lovely War*. The tommies had seen Chaplin's films almost as soon as they were released, in special tents erected behind the front lines, and they knew Charlie was one with them in this war. Why, they were known to place life-size figures of the tramp beside their dugouts as a kind of cardboard mascot against the Germans! (Chaplin was then unknown in Germany.) His movies were even played on the walls of military hospitals. Despite Chaplin's misgivings about *Shoulder Arms*, the film found a warm-hearted reception from troops returning from the war in 1918.

But then came sound. In *Modern Times*, Chaplin said farewell to the tramp, and it seems that by that time he had begun to lose touch with his public. Lynn shows us that all Chaplin's later films were vehicles for his discontents and quarrels with the world, *Limelight* being, in Lynn's judgment, the "most overtly autobiographical" of them all. In addition to the parts in the film that Chaplin assigned members of his family, Lynn discovers references to Chaplin's tormented memories of his mother in Terry's paralysis of the legs. Likewise, he finds the suicide of Florence Deshon—a mistress Chaplin shared with Max Eastman—in Terry's attempt to take her own life, which motivates the plot. For most people, however, what will remain most vividly in the mind after seeing *Limelight* is Chaplin's self-portrait as an old entertainer whose public has deserted him.

Thanks to the modern technology that Chaplin hated, more people can see his films today than he could have thought possible. All the full-length silent and sound films and many of the early shorter ones are now available on video cassette. And thanks to the same modern technology, Chaplin lovers can view the fascinating British television series *Unknown Chaplin*, pro-

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duced in 1982 but available on VHS, in which Chaplin's working methods are revealed with outtakes and reconstructed sequences found in the Chaplin archive. *Modern Times* was released in 1936, the same year that the BBC inaugurated the first regular television service in the world. Lynn makes no mention of this, nor does he deal in depth with the changing nature of mass audiences as first radio and then television created new forms of popular culture in which vaudeville was reborn, though his study is packed with other information about people and topics that have some bearing on his principal subject. While Lynn's prose is free from the jargon that often obscures academic writing about film, the way he organizes all this material in discrete packages, often pages at a time, like hypertext links on a CD-ROM, frequently places a strain on the narrative. The digressions and footnotes certainly add to our knowledge, but do we understand Chaplin any better for them?

Whatever his faults, Chaplin brought pleasure to millions through his art. He still does. Every time we see one of his films we are drawn again to the mythic quality of his screen character. Yet Chaplin himself does not emerge from this study as a heroic figure, for all the author's psychological explanations. Lynn quotes Aldous Huxley saying that, after he'd seen *Monsieur Verdoux*, he felt "terribly sorry for Charlie—such talents, such a mess—in art no less than in life." As Chaplin's biographer, Lynn has grappled with the outward traces of this mess, giving us an unsentimental picture of the art as well as the life. He has searched the records, scoured everything written about Chaplin, viewed all the films, listened to Chaplin's music, spoken with as many people who knew him as he could reach; and yet something about Chaplin's willful, anarchic personality remains hidden. Perhaps only someone who knew the Cockney mentality of the south London streets as Thomas Burke did can properly enter into this enigma. But even Burke in the end had to admit that Chaplin was unknowable.

Shorter notices

John Rewald, in collaboration with Walter Feilchenfeldt and Jayne Warman
The Paintings of Paul Cézanne: A Catalogue Raisonné. Harry N. Abrams, 592 pages (volume 1), 335 pages (volume 2), $400

In his 1962 essay "How Art Writing Earns Its Bad Name," Clement Greenberg condemned contemporary art criticism for its tendency to indulge in "a fatality of misinterpretation that was also a fatality of nonsense." Although Greenberg's point of departure was Harold Rosenberg's famous but woolly essay on "action painting," his larger target was the pretentious and irresponsible writing that, increasingly, was crowding out serious criticism and connoisseurship. As anyone who has leafed through the pages of contemporary art criticism knows, the situation is far worse today than it was in 1962. Rosalind Krauss and Michael Fried, Svetlana Alpers and T. J. Clark: they and their imitators, epigones, and rivals should all be required to recite Greenberg's essay every morning before breakfast.

Important alternatives to the hermetic, politicized jungle of contemporary academic criticism are harder and harder to come by, and this is one reason that John Rewald's monumental *catalogue raisonné* of the paintings of Paul Cézanne must be greeted as a landmark event in the annals of twentieth-century art-historical scholarship. At a time when the very ideal of connoisseurship is held in contempt by many so-called scholars, Rewald's quiet command of his subject, his painstaking and meticulous approach to his material, hearkens back to an earlier and more fruitful scholarly model. Thirty years in the making, this book—the *magnum opus* of a scholarly career studded with important books—is sober and thorough: grounded firmly in facts, patient observation, and, where appropriate, reasoned conjecture and inference.

Rewald, who died early in 1994, has long been acknowledged as the preeminent au-

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thority on Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. Beginning with his 1936 thesis for the Sorbonne on Cézanne and Zola, Rewald devoted himself to the art of Cézanne and his contemporaries and immediate precursors. He edited a volume of Cézanne's correspondence in 1937, Pissarro's letters to his son Lucien in 1944. His *History of Impressionism* (1946) and *Post-Impressionism: From Van Gogh to Gauguin* (1956) instantly established themselves as indispensable reference works for their subjects, supplemented later by the essays in *Studies in Impressionism* (1985) and Rewald's biography of Cézanne, which appeared in 1986. His *catalogue raisonné* of Cézanne's watercolors was published in 1983.

The first attempt to produce an inventory of Cézanne's work was made by Ambroise Vollard, Cézanne's dealer, shortly after the painter's death in 1906. The catalogue never materialized, though some of Vollard's work doubtless appeared in his biography of Cézanne, which was published in 1914. Lionello Venturi, the great Italian scholar who was one of Rewald's inspirations, undertook the task and published his two-volume *catalogue raisonné* of Cézanne's paintings, watercolors, drawings, and prints in 1936. Although itself an immense achievement, Venturi's *Cézanne, Son Art–Son Oeuvre* suffered from various lacunae and false attributions. One of the first to call attention to the problems with Venturi's catalogue was Rewald, who in a 1937 review expressed his admiration for Venturi's accomplishment and detailed his misgivings, especially about the dating of certain works.

Rewald embarked on a new *catalogue raisonné* of Cézanne's work in 1964. Building on Venturi's effort, he has added one hundred and ten items to the *oeuvre*, many of which Venturi himself had accepted before his death in 1960. The present catalogue, beautifully produced by Harry Abrams, is in two volumes. The first contains forty-odd color plates, introductory material by Rewald and his collaborators Jayne Warman and Walter Feilchenfeldt, who completed the catalogue and saw it through the press after Rewald's death, and text for each of the 954 paintings now accepted as part of Cézanne's *oeuvre*. The second contains black and white photographs of the paintings. At a minimum, the text for each entry includes the date and dimensions of the work, reference—where applicable—to its listing in Venturi's and other catalogues, and a bibliography, exhibition history, and provenance. Many entries also feature mini-essays by Rewald. These scholarly gems deal variously with the subject of the painting, the evolution of Cézanne's methods and technique, and pertinent biographical and cultural information. A good number of the entries are accompanied as well by black and white photographs: of the landscapes and people that Cézanne painted, of the artist and his family and friends, of memorabilia from Vollard's archives and elsewhere.

In his fine introductory essay "On the History of this Book," Walter Feilchenfeldt notes that Rewald often said that it would be foolish to consider a *catalogue raisonné* of Cézanne's work definitive: there were just too many uncertainties and problems with dating. And of course there was always the possibility that works hitherto lost might suddenly surface. Perhaps, then, *The Paintings of Paul Cézanne* is not absolutely definitive. But it remains a monument to the highest ideals of art-historical scholarship, a work of brilliant detective work, and a trove of information for anyone interested in Cézanne's work and cultural milieu.

—Roger Kimball

Charlotte Mosley, editor The Letters of Nancy Mitford and Evelyn Waugh. Houghton Mifflin, 531 pages, $35

Nancy Mitford and Evelyn Waugh were possibly the funniest letter writers of their generation, and they kept up a regular correspondence from the time Mitford left England to live in Paris after World War II until Waugh's death in 1966. I had always wondered why their correspondence had

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never been published in its entirety, for it would surely have made one of the most amusing collections ever put together.

Now the correspondence has been published at last, superbly edited by Charlotte Mosley. If one reads between the lines of her Introduction, the delay seems to have been due to the fact that a very large proportion of the material was potentially libelous: 80 percent of Mitford's letters to Waugh, and 40 percent of his to her, were not even included in the writers' individual collected letters. Now, more than thirty years after the correspondence came to an end, the vast majority of the letter writers' contemporaries are dead, and publication in full is finally possible.

Waugh wrote of his father that he "had no itch to get to the truth of a story, frankly preferring its most picturesque form." It was a preference demonstrably inherited by himself, and shared by Nancy Mitford; the two would distort the mildest bit of gossip with wild exaggerations until it metamorphosed into baroque fantasy. "Think of those two skinny creatures [Peter] Quennell & his moll, *slapping one another all night* as I am told they do," Waugh wrote to Mitford. "Gruesome."

Both writers were reticent about their private lives, and had no wish to put their emotions on display. The purpose of their correspondence was to amuse, principally through gossip and teasing. Certain of their acquaintances came in for repeated abuse, such as Cyril Connolly (whom they dubbed "Smartyboots" and of whom, in spite of their frequently cruel raillery, they were very fond). "Boots said," related Waugh, "'I am going to become a waiter at a fashionable restaurant so as to humiliate & reproach my friends for their ingratitude.' He saw a worried look, I suppose on my face & said: 'Ah, I see now I have touched even your cold heart.' So I said: 'Well no Cyril it isn't quite that. I was thinking of your fingernails in the soup.'" Another favorite target was Duff Cooper, for whom the two friends entertained considerably less affection. "I enclose a photograph [of Duff]," Nancy wrote, "& you are not to say you have seen it as it's really very disloyal of me to send it —loyal to you however." "Cooper's memoirs in *Sunday Times* are all an enemy could ask for," wrote Waugh. "But I am his friend now so I weep for him."

Waugh enjoyed goading Mitford about her slightly (very slightly) leftward-leaning politics, her Francophilia, and her tolerance for modern art. Alluding to her unironic use of a word he particularly loathed, he pleaded with her "with all earnestness if we are to continue friends, never use the word 'progressive' in writing to me. . . . It makes me sick and agitated for hours to read it. Please please never again." Mitford accepted the tag of socialist with good humor. She was "riveted" by Stephen Spender's serious tome *World Within World*: "Funnier than anything even you have written—I had to put it down & *scream* time & time again. Pink as I may be . . . I can't but see the hysterical funniness of my fellow pinks." She objected, however, to being labeled a Communist, and during a bout of Parisian rioting commented, "I've never been a Communist & am less than ever now that I see how cowardly they are, fearful cissies, the mere sight of a policeman & off they scoot. I despise them." She urged him to acknowledge that political gradations between center and left did in fact exist. "I know you can't tell the difference between Lloyd George and Stalin," she wrote, "but other people can."

As a novelist, Mitford looked up to Waugh above all of their contemporaries and solicited his opinion on her works-in-progress. He was generous with advice, though interestingly not all of it was very good: for instance he enjoined her to completely rewrite the sublime *Love in a Cold Climate*, keeping in mind the plotting techniques of Henry James, of all people. Fortunately Mitford had a strong enough understanding of her lighter-than-air talents to hold out against him. "I believe most in you because you are cher maître to me but even so one must write as one can," she replied. "People always think I dash off my books

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with no real work, but it is not so, I very honestly do my *best*." But if Waugh could seem inordinately critical of her novels, he expressed wholehearted enjoyment of her historical works. *Voltaire in Love*, he wrote, "should correct two popular heresies 1) Cinema-born, that only beautiful people enjoy fucking 2) Spender-born, that the arts flourish best in a liberal society."

After having sent Mitford a particularly nasty letter about Clarissa Churchill, Waugh repented and asked her to burn it. "What a very rum request," she responded. "I *specially treasure* your nasty letters, posterity will love them so." How right she was. But the most striking thing about this correspondence is that, for all its bitchiness, the overriding tone is one of good humor and high spirits. The two writers really loved one another, and each took care to present the other only with his wittiest, most polished side. Even depression—very real, for both of them—is made light of. "I can't bear anyone else being alive at all," Waugh wrote, "& when a man goes past the window with a barrow or a child shuts a door upstairs I fall into an extremity of rage. . . . L'enfer c'est les autres I think your favourite sage says."

—*Brooke Allen*

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Letters

Pride & shame

To the Editors:
Reading James W. Tuttleton's article "Pride and Shame: The Winning of the West" (October 1996) on the PBS series *The West* was a dispiriting, disappointing experience. His comments regarding Indians and their behavior in the latter part of the last century could not be further off the mark. He states that "war was the highest calling of the Indian people, all outsiders were enemies and therefore ripe for the war party and the hatchet." In actual fact it was the European who brought a greater and more sophisticated level of war to this continent.

Tuttleton is appalled by Indian behavior when they went to war to resist the invasion of their lands. What did he expect these people to do? What have all human beings the world over done when invaded? If Japan had followed up its victory at Pearl Harbor with an invasion of California, would Tuttleton have been outraged if the American people waged war against the invaders? The Indians in the American West did not wage war only in resistance to invasion, they waged war because of the repeated breaking of treaties by the U.S. The Indians always honored such treaties until driven to desperation by the corruption of government agents who stole their treaty provisions and annuities, leaving them to starve and freeze. This is simply a record of history that even the U.S. government today does not deny, yet Tuttleton chooses to ignore it.

Tuttleton describes the Indians as Stone Age peoples, primitive savages, who had no moral justification in fighting against white peoples with an advanced European culture and thus the proper heirs to the American West. The Indians did war against the whites, and they often warred among themselves, but these wars were trifling affairs when compared to the barbarous conflicts conducted by "civilized" European nations over the years and especially in this century. Twenty million residents of the Soviet Union, mostly civilians, were slaughtered by the Germans in World War II. Another fifteen million Europeans were killed in that war, a war orchestrated by "advanced" civilizations. And all this came only a generation after countless millions more were slain in World War I. Yes, these European nations gave us Beethoven and Shakespeare, but they also gave us mass genocide and global barbarity on a scale that would have been incomprehensible to the Stone Age "savages" Tuttleton finds so reprehensible.

Tuttleton's article does much to discredit the legitimate, conservative emphasis on reporting history objectively and debunking the current fad of political correctness. It is so inaccurate and biased that it makes one want to join a parade of left-wing activists. The article does not come close to the standards usually maintained by *The New Criterion*.

J. Ben Tarver
Santa Fe, N.M.

James W. Tuttleton replies:
I am sorry that Mr. Tarver found my review of *The West* dispiriting, but I felt it important to call

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to the attention of readers the one-sided undercurrent of accusation, guilt, and shame that permeated the twelve hours of televised material.

I am not exactly sure whether his objection is a factual one or a moral one. It seems to have elements of both. Surely the factual record is clear that war was the highest calling of Indian men. That is the testimony of every anthropologist and historian that I know, and, as I mentioned in my essay, it is so confirmed in the program itself by Charlotte Black Elk. Anyone who wants historical confirmation may consult Thomas Mails's *The Mystic Warriors of the Plains* (Marlowe, 1995), which makes clear the constant intertribal conflict. On the moral side, I do not see how intertribal savagery can be called a "trifling affair" compared to whites' treatment of the Native American. This is a dangerous relativism. If one's Bannock family were scalped by Shoshones, I don't think one would call it trifling. The record shows that not only families but whole tribes were destroyed by other tribes. If whites introduced onto the scene horses and rifles that accelerated this tribal carnage, how is the Indian absolved?

The idea that "whites took their lands" needs, I think, to be reexamined. Individual tribes regularly went to war with each other over who controlled what hunting grounds. If they moved hundreds of miles north or south, east or west, following game, battling others along the way, I do not see how one can invoke questions of ownership. No one, in fact, owned the western land, although, at different times and places, various tribal leaders claimed it by a verbal declaration.

Of course Indians were Stone Age peoples. This is a fact. They had not yet invented the wheel; they had no alphabet, no written records, etc. Existence was primitive by contemporaneous civilized standards. Despite the Greco-Roman contribution, it took Northern Europe perhaps fifteen hundred years to attain something that we would call a civilized way of life. It took only about two hundred or so in America. Once attained, civilization is easily lost. You and I agree on that. There are people walking the streets of New York City who have hardly emerged from a savagery like that I discussed. I am convinced it would take little to provoke in them an immediate regression to barbarism. The daily newspaper headlines prove it to me.

I do not know what to do with your claim that Europeans, pretending to be civilized, butchered each other by the millions. You are right. But this only shows me that civilization doesn't go very deep. Civilization, in my view, is substantially a matter of individuals; occasionally it is an attribute of societies; once and a while it can be attributed to states or nations. Barbarism is barbarism, whether acted out by an individual, a raiding party, or the Third Reich.

The poignant history of the American Indian is one of manifest destruction. Various government officials did renege on agreements. But I do not believe that the majority of the settlers who gravitated westward went there with the idea of reversing their social and moral convictions so as to effect a genocide. Most of the Indian tribes, for their part, were socially and psychologically unequipped to understand and deal with the social transformation that was occurring. Surely it must say something about the character and condition of the Indian peoples that they could not sufficiently think through, organize themselves (though superior in numbers), and successfully negotiate their future without recourse to violence.

For my part, the past is over. The West was settled, the record is clear, and the problem is how we—Indians and whites—live together now. Sympathy and compassion are due to those in distress, but I do not believe that the historical record should be distorted to protect the sensitivity of minority groups. If I called the Indian great-great-grandfathers savages, it is the case that we are all descended from savages. My father was English and Scots-Irish, and I note that the northern Picts in primordial Scotland painted themselves blue and liked to bathe in enemy blood. I think in the same way about that strain of Irish ancestry on my mother's father's side: many of the northern Irish today—whether pretending to be Protestants or Catholics—are savages. Also, the society of my German great-grandfather gives me a lot to think about in relation to the Wehrmacht.

I am descended, on my mother's mother's side, from the Cherokee Nation in Missouri. I lived for a time in Wyoming, where in school I

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was an honorary Bannock. I am proud of my Indian descent, though clear-sighted enough, I hope, to see that descent for what it was—in both its strengths and weaknesses. It is precisely because I regard myself as an authentic American—that is, someone of mixed background—that I feel bold enough to express contempt for the politically correct twaddle nowadays that distorts American history. We are *already* a multicultural people, but we aren't going to get along any better if we don't effect reconciliations based on the reality of how it was—on both sides—and on mutual forgiveness. That was the burden of my conclusion.

I am sorry that the essay made Mr. Tarver want to join a "parade of left-wing activists." Speaking as part-Cherokee, I don't think the tribes need those patronizing do-gooders any more. What is needed is Indian ideas for escaping the traps of dependency, alcoholism, and despair on the reservations.

Virgil in translation

To the Editors:
In his review of *Virgil in English* (November 1996), John Herington recalled the right anecdote but the wrong *pointe* when he cited "a wise Roman critic" who said that "you could sooner filch his club from Hercules than a line from Virgil." In fact Suetonius in his *vita* was quoting Virgil's own response to critics who accused him of plagiarizing Homer. They should try it, he said: Verum intellecturos facilius esse Herculi clavam quam Homero versum subripere.

As for Vita Sackville-West's splendid *The Land*, it was not "composed in full consciousness of the *Georgics*." When she started writing her poem, Sackville-West later confessed, she had "never read one line of the *Georgics*, either in Latin which I was never taught or in any translation." It was friends who noted the similarity; she acknowledged it, and built on it in her revisions. The details can be found in my *Virgil and the Moderns* (Princeton University Press, 1993).

Theodore Ziolkowski
Professor of Comparative Literature
Princeton University

John Herington replies:
One who consulted the 1927 edition of *The Land* might perhaps be forgiven for supposing, in his innocence, that Victoria Sackville-West wrote the poem with Virgil in mind. The Latin epigraph taken from *Georgics* III, the allusion to the countryside of Virgil's Lombardy in the proem, the apparent reference on page 33 to the account of crop-rotation in *Georgics* I, and the appeals to Virgil by name on pages 89, 106, and 107, might naturally lead to that conclusion. I welcome, however, with great interest Professor Ziolkowski's account of his researches; read "revised with an eye on the *Georgics*," and all will, I suppose, be well again. On the other hand, it was indeed a serious mistake to rely on a too-fallible memory for the passage in Suetonius, and I am grateful for this correction.

A devitalized wariness

To the Editors:
Ferdinand Mount is entitled to dislike the music of Sir Edward Elgar, but he is wrong to imply that it is somehow provincial to regard Elgar as "a great composer" ("A Devitalized Wariness," January 1997). Perhaps Mount is unaware of the esteem in which Elgar is held by serious musicians throughout the Western world. In any case, it is a matter of historical record that he was the first English composer since Purcell *not* to be provincial—that is, to have composed large-scale musical works worthy of a prominent place in "the European tradition." Indeed, it was precisely because Elgar's music was enthusiastically praised by such Continental composers as Richard Strauss that it met with resistance from the provincials of his own time and place. I hate to see so normally perceptive a critic as Ferdinand Mount parrot the received view of Elgar as the Colonel Blimp of English music. He was, in fact, the Kipling of English music (if one has in mind the real Kipling, not the Kipling of ignorant, reductive caricature), and the English should be as proud to claim him as the Austrians are to claim Bruckner.

Terry Teachout
New York, N.Y.

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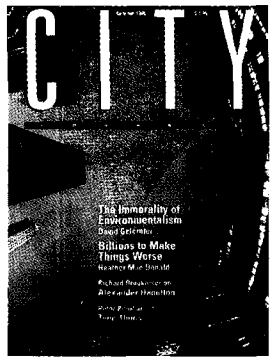

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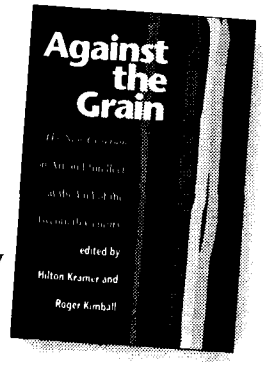

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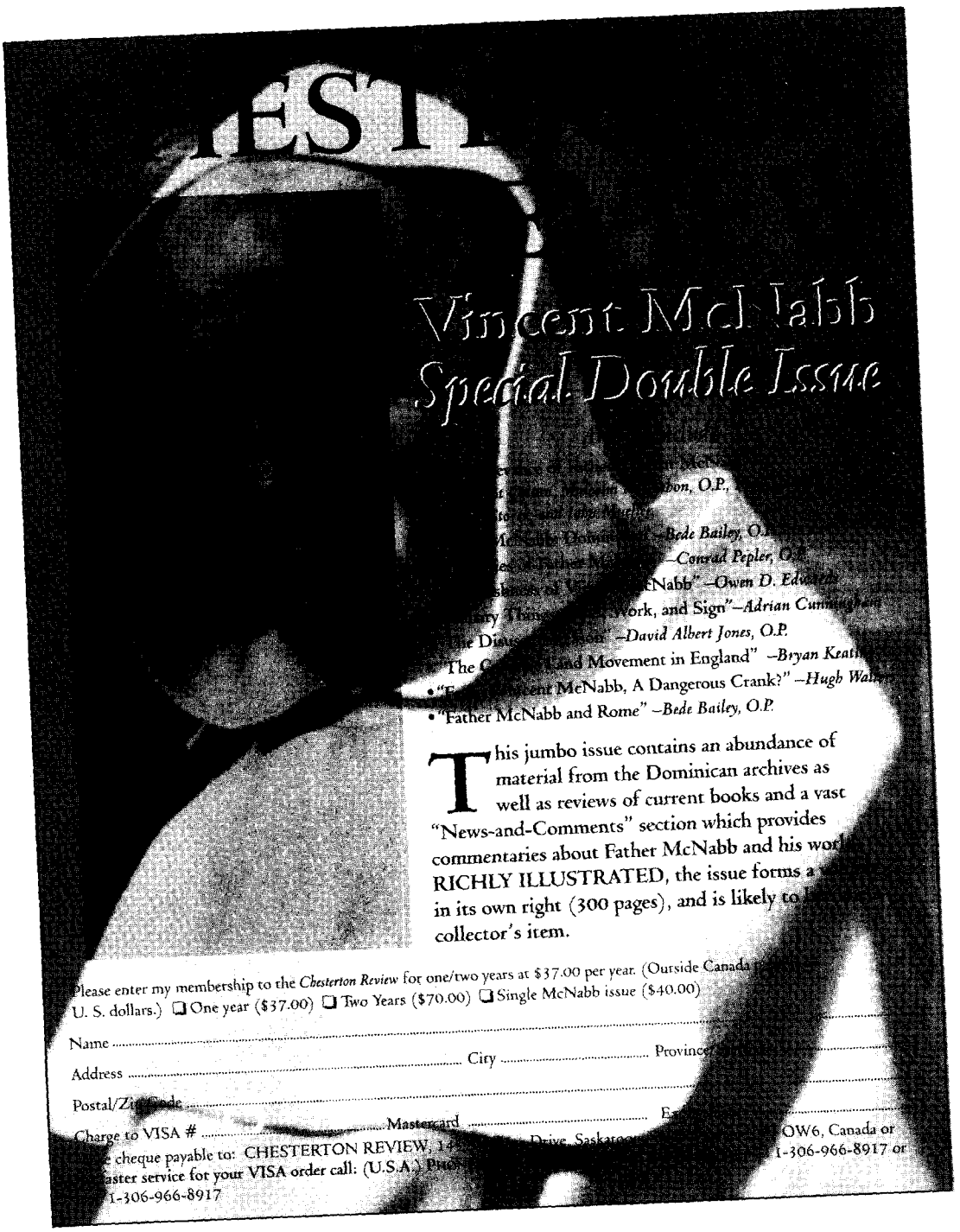
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